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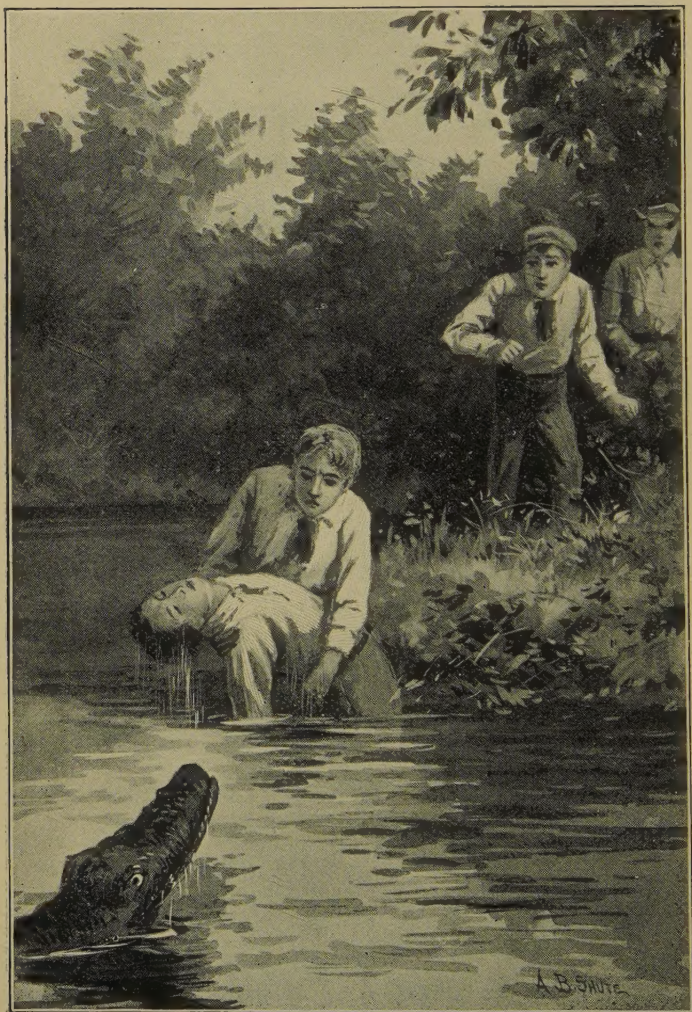
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"Jump for your lives! The 'gator is coming!"—Page 262.

Pan-American Series

YOUNG EXPLORERS OF THE ISTHMUS

OR

AMERICAN BOYS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

BY

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of "Lost on the Orinoco," "The Young Volcano Explorers,"
"American Boys' Life of William McKinley," "With Wash-
ington in the West," "Old Glory Series," "Ship
and Shore Series," etc.

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YOUNG EXPLORERS OF THE ISTHMUS

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PREFACE

"YOUNG EXPLORERS OF THE ISTHMUS" is a complete story in itself, but forms the third volume of a line known by the general title of "Pan-American Series."

As mentioned in a previous volume, when I began this series it was with the idea of acquainting my young friends with some of the sights to be seen in the three Americas, and especially such portions as lie outside of the United States. In the first volume, entitled "Lost on the Orinoco," a visit was paid to Venezuela, where the young explorers, with their tutor, who is also something of a hunter, visited plantations and mines, many cities, the Gulf of Maracaibo, and also the mighty river which lends to the volume its name; in the second volume, called "The Young Volcano Explorers," the steps of the young travelers were turned toward Cuba, Porto Rico, and other islands of the West Indies, not forgetting the ill-fated Isle of Martinique, with its fearful eruption

of Mont Pélée, and also St. Vincent, with its equally fearful but less fatal volcano, La Soufrière.

In the present work the scene is shifted to Central America, where the boys and their worthy professor and guide land at Greytown, Nicaragua. They are interested in the proposed canal, and journey from this point up to Lake Nicaragua, stopping at many points of interest. A visit to the old town of Granada is followed by a journey down the lake coast to Rivas, and then into Costa Rica, where stops are made at Arenas, Alajuela, San José, and Cartago. At Limon they take steamer across the Mosquito Gulf to Colon (Aspinwall), and finish up their eventful journey by a trip across the Isthmus to Panama—a trip which proves full of unusual excitement, and with a touch of mystery.

In the preparation of the historical and geographical portions of this work, the very latest and best authorities have been consulted. At times these authorities differ in their statements, yet it is hoped that the tale is sufficiently correct to warrant being placed in the hands of any wide-awake boy or young man who is anxious to know something of the resources and developments of other American countries than our own.

Again thanking my young friends for the unusual interest they have shown in my previous stories, I place this in their hands, trusting it will prove entertaining and profitable.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

February 18, 1903.

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YOUNG EXPLORERS OF THE ISTHMUS

CHAPTER I

THE YOUNG EXPLORERS

"WHERE do you think the professor will take us next, Mark?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Frank—perhaps to Colombia. You know we were going there when we suddenly changed our minds and came northward to the West Indies."

"I know where I should like to go, if we go to Colombia," put in a third boy of the group of four that sat on the deck of an ocean steamer. "I'd like to visit the Isthmus of Panama. The newspapers are full of talk about the great canal down there, and I'd like to see what sort of a thing the canal is."

"I think before we go farther south we ought to visit Central America," came from the fourth boy,

a lad with curly hair and merry, twinkling eyes. "There's another canal route up there, you know, the Nicaragua route, running through Nicaragua Lake. I was reading of that lake. I'd like to sail on it and visit some of its numerous islands."

"Sam would like to sail on that lake; eh, Sam?" came from the first speaker, he called Frank. "You could get lost again in the darkness, as you did on Lake Maracaibo, in Venezuela."

"Don't mention that adventure," cried Sam, with a shiver. "I'll never forget it, and how alarmed I was for fear some wild beast would attack me."

"Not to say anything about how alarmed we were when we found you had tumbled overboard from the boat," returned the youth called Mark. "But to come back to where we started. I'd like to visit Central America myself before we strike out for some other country farther south. I was reading about Nicaragua in one of the magazines in the steamer's library, and I got tremendously interested in the sights to be seen there, and what trouble the natives used to have with American filibusters and others, who wanted to run things to suit themselves."

"Let us go and ask the professor about it now,"

came from the boy with the curly hair and merry eyes.

“That’s Darry all over!” laughed Frank. “He never believes in waiting. Now, I thought it was settled that we should decide nothing until we reached Trinidad, and found out what had become of Glummy.”

“Oh, we’ll get to Port-of-Spain by to-morrow, so the captain says, and we’ll be sure to find Hockley at the hotel, taking it easy or sporting around as fast as his pocketbook will allow. My word on it, he has not suffered for a good time since he has been out of Professor Strong’s reach. He wouldn’t be Jake the Glum if he didn’t go it for all he’s worth—when he isn’t watched,” concluded Sam, with a wise shake of his long and somewhat classical head.

At the last words there was a faint ripple of laughter, showing that Sam had “struck the nail on the head,” as Frank expressed it, and then several started to speak at once. It would be impossible to put down all that these four wide-awake American lads said as the discussion warmed up, and so instead we will leave the talk to take care of itself, and introduce the youths in a more specific manner than has already been accomplished through their conversation.

The youngest boy of the group, he of the curly hair and twinkling eyes, was Dartworth Crane, the son of a prosperous Chicago cattle dealer. Darry he was generally called, and he was as full of fun as an egg is full of meat, or a "shad full of bones," as his chums sometimes put it. If a practical joke was played, eyes were generally turned on Darry, and with good reason, too.

The oldest and tallest boy of the crowd, and the one generally appealed to for advice, was Mark Robertson. He was seventeen, and the son of a New York dry-goods importer. Mark's folks were rich, but there was little that was "stuck up" about the young fellow, and, as a consequence, he was exceedingly popular all around.

Mark's residence, when at home, was on Madison Avenue, New York City, and directly across the street lived Frank Newton, already mentioned. Frank's father was a banker, and the Robertson family and the Newton family had been close friends for years.

The fourth lad of the group hailed from the Back Bay district of Boston. His name was Samuel Winthrop, but he had been nicknamed "Beans," and this name seemed destined to stick to him, despite the

protests of his mother, who was a rich widow. Sam was the student of the crowd, a great lover of history and archæological research, and also of geology, but as he seldom "aired his knowledge," unless called upon to do so, the others thought as much of their chum "Beans" as they did of anyone.

Such were the four; but at this point it is proper to introduce another youth, who really belonged to the party, although not then present. He has already been mentioned as "Glummy" and as "Jake the Glum," because of his disposition, which at times was sour and morose. His real name was Jacob Hockley, and he was the son of a wealthy Pennsylvania lumber dealer. Hockley belonged to the party, but it cannot be said that he had a single warm friend, and with good reason, as we shall soon learn.

A little over a year before the opening of this story all these boys had attended a boarding academy presided over by Professor Amos Strong, a gentleman who, before settling down to teach, had been a great traveler and hunter. A fire had burned the school edifice to the ground, and while it was rebuilding it was proposed that Professor Strong should utilize his time by taking some of his students on a trip southward. The matter was talked over

many times, and as a result the rebuilding of the academy, and its future management, were intrusted to Professor Strong's brother, while the professor himself, secretly delighted to get back to traveling again, made all arrangements for taking the five boys on a tour which should embrace South America, Central America, the West Indies, and other points.

To Mark, Frank, Sam, and Darry the idea of having Jacob Hockley along was not an agreeable one, but Hockley had been one of the first to enlist for the tour, and Professor Strong declined to "throw over" the unpopular youth.

"I was thinking that perhaps the trip would do him good," Professor Strong had said. "Travel, you know, is said to broaden the mind. I trust you all treat him fairly." And the others had promised to treat the tall, lanky youth as well as they could.

From New York the party had journeyed to La Guayra, a seaport of Venezuela, and in the first volume of this series, entitled "Lost on the Orinoco," I related the particulars of numerous adventures while sight-seeing in that South American republic. The young explorers had taken in many wonderful sights and been in more than one position of peril,

not the least of which was a ride over a high waterfall, participated in by Frank and Mark, and a fight with a dreadful boa-constrictor, which had caught Hockley in its folds and which was dispatched in the nick of time by Sam and Darry.

From Venezuela the party had turned up the Caribbean once more, and in the second volume of this series, called "The Young Volcano Explorers," I gave the details of their visit to Cuba, Jamaica, Hayti, Porto Rico, and other islands of the West Indies. At this time the fathers of Mark and Frank had gone to St. Pierre, Martinique, on business. Anxious to see their parents, the boys persuaded the professor to take the whole party to Martinique. The island was hardly sighted when the dreadful eruption of Mont Pélée occurred, a catastrophe which came close to ending the life of more than one of the youthful travelers. But all escaped with nothing more than slight burns, and it was afterward learned that Mr. Robertson and Mr. Newton had likewise escaped to Kingstown, on the island of St. Vincent.

The one person of the party who had been fairly demoralized with fear over the awful volcanic eruptions had been Hockley, and without waiting for the

others the lank youth had taken passage on a steamer bound for Port-of-Spain on the island of Trinidad. He had left a note behind him, stating he would stop at the same hotel at which the party had put up while on the trip to the mouth of the Orinoco River.

"I knew Hockley wouldn't stay," Darry had said.

"Oh, he's scared out of his boots," had been Frank's comment. But they had said little more than this, for the awful volcanic outbursts had put them all in a sober frame of mind.

Anxious to learn what had become of Hockley, it was not long before Professor Strong engaged passage for himself and the boys with him on a steamer bound for Port-of-Spain, and it is on the deck of this vessel that we now find our young friends, discussing the all-important question of where their future explorations would take them.

CHAPTER II

A STOP AT PORT-OF-SPAIN

THE vessel upon which Professor Strong and the young explorers had taken passage reached the harbor of Port-of-Spain, on the island of Trinidad, early the next morning, and the party went on shore without delay.

Having already stopped at this British town, the visit lacked something of novelty, yet all the boys were more or less interested in the sights around them.

"It's a good deal different from anything we have in the States, even if the people do talk English," remarked Sam.

"I believe it really looks cleaner than when we were here before," returned Mark. "And there is a good bit of building going on, too."

When visiting Port-of-Spain before they had stopped at the Cunningham House, kept by a whole-souled Englishman named Wellington Cunningham.

To this they now directed their steps, hoping to find Jacob Hockley there awaiting them.

Frank and Darry were in the lead, the others having lingered behind, the professor to look after their baggage and Mark and Sam to do some buying at one of the clothing shops—for their outfits had suffered greatly during their adventures on and around the island of Martinique.

The Hotel Cunningham was situated a little back from the street and was surrounded by a number of fine trees, around which were seats for those who cared to rest in the shade.

As Frank and Darry approached a clump of these trees they heard the yelp of a dog, a muttered exclamation, a thump, and then another yelp.

"I'll teach you to mind me, you little brute!" came to their ears, in Hockley's voice. "I didn't pay two dollars for you for nothing. Now sit up and beg, or I'll knock your head off!" And then came another thump and another yelp of pain.

"It's Glummy!" came from Frank and Darry, simultaneously.

"And he's playing the bully, as usual," added Darry. "Oh, what a shame to beat such a nice little dog as that!"

"He shan't do it!" came hotly from Frank, and his eyes flashed in quick anger. He raised his voice: "Say, Hockley, let up there! Leave that little dog alone!"

They had passed around the trees and some bushes and come in sight of the tall youth and the creature he was abusing. The dog was a cute little fellow, of a kind common in the West Indies. He had short, sharp ears and a bushy tail, and was trying his best to sit up on his hind legs and "beg." Over the dog stood Hockley, with a broad, flat stick in his hand, his eyes full of senseless passion.

The bully was about to hit the dog again when the sound of Frank's voice reached his ears. He looked up in astonishment and then his face took on a sour look.

"So you have got here at last, eh?" he said hesitatingly. "It's about time."

"Yes, I should say it was about time," replied Frank pointedly. "What are you doing to that dog?"

"Trying to make him mind me. But the little beggar doesn't want to mind."

"You were beating him with the stick."

"Well, what if I was? He's my dog—I paid two

dollars for him. The boy I bought him from said he could do a lot of tricks, but he won't do them for me."

"I shouldn't think he would—the way you've been hammering him," put in Darry. "Instead of making him mind you are only scaring him."

"Now see here, I want none of your interference!" stormed the big youth. "I know my own business. If you came here just to have a row, it would have been better if you had stayed away."

"We don't want any row, Jake," came from Frank. "But it's a shame to treat a little dog so roughly." He snapped his fingers at the creature, and the dog looked up wonderingly and half wagged his tail. "He'd be all right if you'd handle him right."

The dog slunk away from Hockley, came up to Frank, licked the boy's hand, and crept behind him for protection. Then, when Frank patted him on the head, he sprang up and pawed the youth on the knees joyfully. Then Darry snapped his fingers, and the dog came running to him with short, sharp barks of satisfaction, as though he suddenly realized that two friends were at hand.

These actions on the part of the dumb creature

made Hockley more angry than ever. His face grew dark and full of hate.

"You let my dog alone!" he cried. "Let him alone, I say! He is mine, and I can make him do what I want without you putting in your oar."

"All right, we'll let him alone if you say so," came slowly from Frank, after a glance at Darry. "But don't you go to beating him any more."

"Huh! What are you going to do about it if I do?"

"We'll stop you, that's what we'll do," replied Darry.

"Really? Perhaps now you have arrived, you think you are going to run things to suit yourselves, eh?" questioned Hockley sarcastically. "Well, it won't work, let me tell you that. I've thought it over since I've been here waiting for you, and I've made up my mind that in the future I'm going to play second fiddle to nobody. I'm going to have my say in everything, and the professor has got to listen to me just as well as he listens to you—or else I'm going to quit the party and travel on my own hook."

It was on the tip of Frank's tongue to say that he hoped Hockley would quit the party, but he checked

himself and also checked a similar remark which arose to Darry's lips.

"I think you've had your full share of everything, Jake," he said. "Professor Strong listens to you just as much as he does to any of us."

"Yes, listens, and that's all it amounts to. When he puts anything to a vote, you fellows vote against me every time."

"That isn't altogether true, and you know it. I have often gone somewhere just to please you instead of myself—and the others have done the same."

"Yes, once in a great while—when you thought there would be a first-class row if you didn't." Hockley paused awkwardly. "Did the others come with you?"

"We all came in on the same ship, but the others stopped down in the town on business. Did you get our letter?" Frank added, hoping to drop the quarrel, at least for the present.

"Got it yesterday. The mails are beastly slow down here—in fact, everything is slow." Hockley paused again. "I guess you were glad enough to leave Kingstown and get away from the volcanoes."

"Oh, we weren't so scared—after we got used to

the thing," replied Darry. "What are you going to do with this dog, take him along?"

"Don't know but that I will, if he'll behave himself. But I don't want any of you to interfere," and the big youth's face grew dark once more.

All three turned toward the hotel. The dog trotted in advance. Hockley tried to call him back, but he would not come and disappeared in the direction of a nearby stable. The bully ran after him.

"He's the same old Hockley," said Frank, with something like a sigh. "Always trying to domineer over somebody or something."

"He makes a fellow sick," returned Darry. "But he shan't misuse that dog, that's settled."

"Yes, that's settled, Darry."

In the hotel office they met Wellington Cunningham, who was expecting them. The face of the Englishman broke into a broad smile as he shook each by the hand.

"Downright glad to see you back," said he. "'Ope you 'ad a fine time hof hit hin Venezuela. The beastly country would never suit me. So you went up to Cuba and the hother hislands, too? Well, well, you lads are doing a sight hof traveling. That's right, go hit while you're young, as my big brother

'Arry use to say, nothink like traveling. Hit's a wonder you weren't burnt hup at St. Pierre. Did you get hanywhere near that bloomin' volcano?"

"Too near for comfort," laughed Darry. "During one of the eruptions we came close to being snowed under by the dust, ashes, and fire."

"Snowed hunder, his hit? Ha! ha! Rather beastly 'ot snow, I'm thinkin'." Wellington Cunningham laughed until his whole portly frame shook. "Well, now you're hout hof hit, make yourselves hat 'ome."

"Thank you, we will," said both boys.

It was not very long after this that the others came up. Mark and Sam were the first to arrive, and Frank and Darry immediately told them of Hockley and the dog incident.

"So he's going to have his say," observed Mark. "All right; but he mustn't step all over us, even so."

"It's too bad," came from Sam. "I was thinking that all would run smoothly after this. But I suppose Glummy can't change his nature any more than a mule can help being a mule."

"Right thou art, Beans," came from fun-loving Darry. "Nature is nature the world over. Now I was reading in a newspaper of a man from Boston

who dropped dead one Sunday morning in a hotel down South just because he couldn't get his usual portion of Boston baked beans——”

Darry stopped short and dodged, as Sam pretended to shy something at him. Then Darry got behind Mark for pretended safety.

“You'd better retire, on such a crusty joke as that,” remarked Sam. “I'd rather hail from the land of beans than Chicago, the home of the great American hog.”

“That's right, pitch into each other,” was Mark's comment. “Pork and beans always did go well together.” And then there was a general laugh, in which Sam and Darry joined as heartily as did the others.

“But to get back to Glummy,” said Sam, when the laugh had died out. “I really can't understand why he should——”

He broke off short, as he saw Frank shake his head in a peculiar manner. Unknown to all of them, Hockley had approached and now stood behind Sam.

“So you are here and talking about me,” said the big youth, in hard tones and with a disagreeable look in his fishy eyes.

“ Oh! Why—er—how do you do, Jake? ” stammered Sam, scarcely knowing what to say.

He held out his hand, but the bully did not take it; and there was a pause which was more than awkward. In the midst of this Professor Strong came up, much to Sam’s relief.

CHAPTER III

OFF FOR CENTRAL AMERICA

"How do you do, Jacob? I am glad to see you looking so well," said Professor Strong, as he hustled up and gave the tall youth's hand a hearty grip. "How have you been since you arrived here?"

"First-rate, sir," was the slow answer. Hockley shot a look at Sam which spoke volumes. "That is, sir, it's been awfully slow."

"I presume you have missed your companions. Well, we are all together again now and I know of nothing to separate us in the future. We have had any number of adventures, but we have come out 'on top,' to quote Darry."

"It's a question of where we are to go next, professor. I don't care to go just anywhere."

"I imagine none of us want to go 'just anywhere,' Jacob. We started out to visit Central and South Americas and the West Indies. So far we might say that our trip is but just begun."

"You said something about taking us to Brazil next."

"Nothing is settled yet. We can talk it over after the boys who came with me have had a chance to rest."

"I don't know as I care to go to Brazil just now. I've heard there is an awful lot of fever down there."

"There are more or less fevers in all hot climates, especially at points where the ground is low and wet."

"I was thinking I should like to strike westward into Colombia—that is, if we didn't get mixed up in any of their revolutions."

"Why, that would be fun," came from Mark. He spoke half jestingly. "Think of joining a revolutionary army—a crowd of barefooted fellows, with big straw hats and rifles fifty years behind the times. Why, you might come out of the mix-up a corporal or a general."

"Oh, it's no joke," growled Hockley. "I came down here for the sport of it—not to fight. Not but that I can fight if I have to," he added, with a savage look at the other boys.

"We'll do our best to steer clear of all revolutions, no matter where we go," said Professor

Strong, with a smile. "And that means revolutions inside of our circle as well as outside," he added, with a shrewd look.

The professor went off to see that proper rooms had been assigned to them, and one after another the boys followed him. As Sam passed with Frank, Hockley sidled up to them.

"I want to know what you were talking about?" he demanded of Sam.

"Oh, it's not worth mentioning, Jake," answered Sam. "As the professor says, let us steer clear of revolutions," and he hurried on before the bully could answer.

"They're against me, it's plain to see that," muttered Hockley to himself. "But I'll show them they shan't have everything their own way." And then he went off to look for his dog, which had in some mysterious manner disappeared.

The boys found their rooms large and comfortable, and soon removed all signs of travel. Then they went to the dining room for the mid-day lunch, for all were as hungry as growing boys can be. Hockley met them at the table, but had little to say.

It was very warm, and after the meal all of the party were glad enough to take it easy in the garden

of the hotel, where there were numerous hammocks and easy chairs. Frank and Mark fell asleep and were not disturbed for two hours. During this time Hockley slipped away and into his own room. Here he locked the door and then sat down to enjoy himself by smoking cigarettes and reading a blood-curdling half-dime novel called "Steel-Grip, the Silent Detective; or, Rounding up the Circle of Vengeance." Hockley imagined Steel-Grip the greatest detective that ever lived, and fairly devoured the pamphlet, one trashy chapter after another. He had been warned against such reading several times, but considered himself safe from detection.

After the long rest during the heat of the day, Professor Strong suggested a drive, and soon they were out in a big victoria and bowling along over the smooth roads for which the suburbs of the town are famous. They passed many beautiful flower gardens and under arch after arch of stately palms.

On returning to the hotel they found it time for dinner, which was served at half-past seven. On entering the dining room the proprietor came up and asked if he could introduce an old friend of his, Captain Rodrick, of the steamer *Belle of the Sea*.

"To be sure," said Professor Strong. "I am always glad to meet an old sea captain." And so Captain Rodrick was brought forward, and he and Wellington Cunningham sat down to dine with the others.

During the course of the meal it developed that Captain Rodrick was part owner and master of a big ocean "tramp" which for several years had been picking up and carrying freight between various ports on the Caribbean Sea. He had just come in from a trip to Jamaica and Hayti, and was now loading with a cargo for ports in Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

The captain was much interested in what the others had to tell about their exploring, and asked for the full details concerning the eruption of Mont Pélée.

"I ran into some of that volcano dust myself, when the *Belle of the Sea* was miles and miles out of sight of land," he said. "It must have been a terrifying sight close by. I am glad I didn't stop at St. Pierre. I came close to picking up part of a cargo for that port, but the shippers wouldn't meet me on rates."

From speaking of the volcano the talk drifted

around to Nicaragua, and the captain told them of his visits to Greytown and of a trip he had taken up the San Juan River to Lake Nicaragua. For the fun of it he had once gone into the interior with a party in search of rubber and almost lost his life in a swamp that seemed to have no end.

"I don't know as I'd care to get into such a swamp as that," said Mark. "Yet I should like to visit Nicaragua and see what has been done towards an interoceanic canal at this point."

"The canal, lad, is mostly on paper. When I was there they had dug some of the mud out, and blasted some rock, but the dredging machines were idle and going to pieces for the want of use. It will take a whole pot of money to put a canal across, no matter at what point they try it."

"I'd about made up my mind that I wanted to go to Nicaragua," came unexpectedly from Hockley. "A fellow was here last week who said he had had a fine time at Granada and Rivas. He said the people he met treated him like a lord."

"I suppose he had money to spend," answered the captain dryly. "But the natives are good-hearted—that is, if they don't take it into their heads that you have come down there to capture the country.

They have no use for filibusters—not after what has happened in the past.”

The captain proved to be jolly company and many of the stories he told brought forth roars of laughter. One he told of some monkeys that had stolen his shaving outfit and then started in to shave themselves was particularly comical, and made Frank laugh until the tears started down his cheeks.

“ Oh, say, but I’d like to sail with him ! ” he whispered to Mark, when they were leaving the table. “ The time on shipboard wouldn’t drag a bit.” And Mark nodded, to show that he agreed.

On the following morning Professor Strong gathered the boys around him in the reading room of the hotel.

“ You will please come to order, young gentlemen,” he said, in the style of the days when he had been their academy teacher. “ We have an important question to settle. That question is: Where shall we go next? I know it was left for me to decide how I should take you from one point to another on this trip, but I wish to satisfy the taste of each individual, if such a thing is possible. I know that among six of us there must be more or less of a difference of opinion, so if everybody is not satis-

fied there will be nothing left but to make the best of it. Now I have a plan, and have come prepared to put it into execution. Here are five sheets of paper and five pencils. Without saying a word to each other I wish each of you to take a sheet of paper and write down just where you would like to travel next. When you are done hand the papers to me."

The boys agreed, and taking the papers went to work without delay. They had soon finished and when Professor Strong had all the papers he examined them. After reading the last he smiled broadly.

"For once you are all agreed," he said.

"Hurrah! Then we are to go to Central America!" came from Darry.

"And we are to sail with Captain Rodrick," put in Frank. "I made a strong point of that on my paper."

"I mentioned that, too," added Sam.

"Yes, we can sail with Captain Rodrick—if he wants any passengers, and his vessel is as good as he says she is."

"But we must stop off at Granada and Rivas," interrupted Hockley. "I don't want to go if we can't stop off at those cities."

"To be sure we'll stop at those places, Jacob—since they are important towns of Nicaragua," returned the professor.

Captain Rodrick had left the hotel to look after the loading of the steamer. They followed him down to the wharves, and Professor Strong soon made the necessary arrangements with him. For the amount of money the professor agreed to pay the captain said he would see to it that the best of everything was provided for the cabin table. He expected to take no other passengers but a Spaniard bound for Greytown, so that they would virtually have the run of the ship to themselves. The *Belle of the Sea* would be ready to sail in three days.

"Glad you are going with my friend," said Wellington Cunningham, when told of it. "'E's an hall-right chap, Captain Rodrick his—ha regular tart, has my brother 'Arry used to say."

The three days passed swiftly, especially for the boys who had to replenish their wardrobes. During their stay at Port-of-Spain they visited several public buildings which had been missed on their previous trip, and Darry, always eager for a ride, went out on horseback twice, but under the professor's care, for Darry, as my old readers know, was apt to get reck-

less when mounted on a steed that could go. Their last day on shore was Sunday, and they attended services at the main cathedral of the city, where they heard an excellent sermon and some equally excellent music.

“And now we are off!” cried Darry, on the following morning, as they climbed on board of the steamer. “Hurrah for Nicaragua and the rest of Central America!” And all of the others, but Hockley, echoed the cry. Hockley was out of sorts over the fact that they had all agreed to go to Nicaragua with him, leaving him nothing to grumble at.

By noon the *Belle of the Sea* was under way. Their course was westward past Chacachacare Island and then northward through the Dragon’s Mouth. By nightfall land had faded away in the misty distance; and the voyage to Central America was fairly begun.

CHAPTER IV

A TALK ABOUT NICARAGUA

"WHAT did Hockley do with his dog?" questioned Darry of Frank, as they came on deck the following morning.

"I don't know," answered Frank. "I didn't see him bring the dog on board."

"The dog ran away," put in Mark, who was with the others. "Glummy looked all around the hotel for him, but it was no use. He thinks the boy who sold him the dog in the first place stole him."

"Well, it's a good thing for the dog he didn't have to come along," was Frank's comment. "Glummy won't have a chance to misuse him."

The *Belle of the Sea* was a vessel of seven thousand tons burden. She was just wide enough to be safe and just narrow enough to give her good speed. She had an iron hull, with numerous compartments, and, having been completely overhauled and refurnished only the year before, was thoroughly comfortable throughout.

As was to be expected, the boys lost no time in inspecting the craft from stem to stern. Captain Rodrick went with them, explaining many things, so that a couple of hours passed swiftly. Then the captain went off to attend to his duties, leaving them in comfortable chairs under an awning on the upper deck.

Hockley had gone with the crowd on the tour of inspection, but he had not been greatly interested, declaring that it looked very much like other steamers upon which they had sailed, and that the engine-room was abominably hot. As a matter of fact, it was hot down near the furnaces, and all were glad to get where they could have the benefit of what little breeze was blowing.

"This is just all right," declared Mark, as he ran his hand through his hair, which was rather long. "It beats life on Martinique all to pieces."

"It is fearfully hot," growled Hockley. "I didn't dream we were going to stick so close to the equator while we were down here."

"We are not on the equator now," put in Frank. "We are eleven degrees north of the line. We were pretty close to it when we were below the Orinoco."

“What’s the latitude of the place we are going to?” questioned Mark.

“The same as this. I looked it up in the professor’s atlas.”

“Then we can expect about the same weather. Well, we can be thankful it’s no hotter.”

“I was reading an account of Nicaragua,” came from Darry. “It said that in that country they have rain nearly all the time along the eastern coast, but that it is very nice on the western coast.”

“That is true, Dartworth,” put in Professor Strong. “In the east the land is low and swampy, while in the west it is mountainous and rocky. As a consequence, more than three-quarters of the population live in the western section.”

“What is the population of Nicaragua?”

“It is estimated at something over four hundred thousand people, but there may be many blacks and Indians in the interior who have never been counted. I was going to give you a little talk on the country this afternoon, but perhaps it will be as well to have it now. Come, we will go into the cabin, where I can hang up the map I brought along.”

The boys followed the professor, Hockley grumbling a little, but the others eager to listen to what

he might have to tell them. The map was hung up on a center post, and Professor Strong sat down in front of it, with the others ranged in a semicircle before him.

"As you will see by looking at the map," said Professor Strong, "Nicaragua lies about in the center of Central America. It's general shape is that of a triangle, with an almost straight line on the east, bounded by the Caribbean Sea. The northwest line separates it from Honduras, through a country that is but little known, and where the actual boundary line is much in dispute. The southwest boundary consists of about two hundred miles of the Pacific Ocean, and below this the republic of Costa Rica."

"Is it a very large country?" asked Hockley, who felt bound to say something.

"The area is about 59,000 square miles. Can any of you compare that with the size of any State at home?"

There was a moment of silence, in which Hockley looked the blankest of all.

"I know New York State has about 49,000 square miles," came from Mark.

"It's a little larger than New York and New Jersey combined," put in Frank.

"A little larger than New York and Massachusetts together!" cried Sam.

"A little larger than Illinois," added Darry. "I guess you could throw in little Delaware for good measure;" and then there was a laugh all around.

"You are all about right," went on Professor Strong. He turned again to the map. "As you will see, toward the southwestern part of the country are two bodies of water, Lake Nicaragua and Lake Managua. Lake Nicaragua is of considerable importance. It is over ninety miles long by about forty miles wide, and contains numerous islands. This lake is located over a hundred feet above sea level, and in some spots is said to be very deep. A very curious thing about this body of water is the fact that it is the home of numerous sharks."

"Sharks!" cried several of the boys in concert.

"Excuse me from bathing there," murmured Frank.

"Or from tumbling overboard," added Mark.

"There is a good-sized river, the San Juan, which connects Lake Nicaragua with the Caribbean Sea, the various mouths being in the vicinity of Greytown."

"Is this the river they wanted to use for part of the Nicaragua Canal?" asked Darry.

"Yes, although the canal was to cut across many of the winding turns of the stream."

"I should think making a canal here would be easy," observed Mark.

"Not so easy as you think. In the east the country is flat and swampy, as I said before; and there the river is continually filling up with mud from its banks. Farther west the country is rocky, and there are several rapids in the river, where canal locks would have to be built. Parallel to the Pacific Ocean there is a range of mountains which extends all the way from North to South America, and these offer additional obstacles to putting the waterway through."

"But the canal will go through some day, either at Nicaragua or at the Isthmus of Panama," cried Frank enthusiastically. "Just wait until Uncle Sam takes hold, and you'll see things begin to move."

"A great deal of work has already been done on a canal, but the company went into the hands of a receiver, for the lack of funds. There is one serious difficulty: Nicaragua has more or less earthquakes,

and at some time one of these may damage the canal route very much."

"Earthquakes!" gasped Hockley, in quick alarm. "Why didn't you say something about them before? I don't want to go to any country that has earthquakes!"

"They haven't had a serious earthquake there in years, Jacob, so do not grow alarmed. The earth trembles a little at times, but nobody living there is alarmed—they get used to it."

"I don't think I'd ever get used to earthquakes," grumbled the tall youth.

"I shouldn't think you would, by the way you dug out from St. Vincent," put in Frank, before he had time to think twice.

"You shut up!" snapped Hockley, his face suddenly growing red. "What I did was my own business, not yours."

"Come, come, boys; don't quarrel," interposed the professor quietly, but firmly. "I am sure none of us like earthquakes." He turned again to the map. "The capital city of Nicaragua is Managua, situated upon the lake of that name, and containing perhaps ten thousand inhabitants."

"That isn't much of a town," observed Mark.

"The principal city is Leon, located in the extreme west, and containing over fifty thousand people. Besides these two, there are several places with a population of from ten to fifteen thousand. The small villages are very numerous."

"I suppose most of the people are Spaniards?" came from Sam.

"The races are very much mixed, Samuel, and include creoles, Indians, blacks, and a few Europeans and Americans. The common language is Spanish, and Spanish and Indian dialects, and the state religion is Roman Catholic."

"How can they have a state religion if it's a republic?" questioned Mark.

"Nicaragua is a republic mostly in name, Mark. The President is really a military despot, and is always at the head of the army. But there is a House of Congress of forty members, who are supposed to control, even if they do not do so. Many years ago Nicaragua was a province belonging to Guatemala. It became independent in 1821."

"Didn't it belong to some kind of a Central American Federation?" questioned Darry.

"It did, up to 1840, when it became absolutely independent. For years the country has been torn

up by civil strife, and some filibusters did their best to become its masters, but failed."

"Are the people rich?" came from Hockley. He was always interested in knowing what anybody was worth, and judged all persons by the monetary standard.

"No, Jacob; the majority of people in Nicaragua are poor, although, of course, there are some rich families. The commerce of the country has been very backward, yet the territory contains large quantities of gold and silver, and also very valuable cabinet woods, and much rubber. All tropical fruits are raised there, and also coffee, sugar, cotton, and tobacco. Chickens and cattle are not lacking, and the most numerous animal of all is the monkey. He inhabits the forests to the number of thousands upon thousands."

"We'll have to look out that the monkeys don't steal our boat on us, as they did down on the Orinoco," observed Frank. That had proved an experience he was not likely to forget for many a day.

"Yes, we'll have to watch the monkeys," answered Professor Strong, with a laugh; "for they'll play you any number of tricks if you give them the chance."

CHAPTER V

FUN ON SHIPBOARD

"FELLOWS, Jake the Glum is at it again, and I, for one, won't stand it."

It was Darry who spoke. He had just come up to where Mark, Frank, and Sam were leaning over the rail, looking at the bluish-green sea and the gulls sweeping the surface of the waves in the bright sunlight. His face was troubled, and his hands were clenched.

"What's gone wrong now?" questioned Frank dryly. "Has he offered to loan you ten dollars?"

"Perhaps he has offered to be your chum for life," suggested Mark.

"You know well enough what I mean," went on Darry half savagely. "Oh, how I wish he wasn't along!"

"But what is it all about?" questioned Sam. "Don't keep us dying to know."

"I can't tell you how it started, exactly, but before I knew it he was blowing as hard as ever about how

much money his father had, and all that, and then he switched around and said he wanted me to understand that he wasn't going to play second fiddle to any of us, and that he was going to tell the professor about it, too. He said he hadn't forgotten how he had been doused with water while he was in bed, and made to believe that the ship was sinking."

"Didn't you tell him that we hadn't forgotten how he put pitch in our shoes?" broke in Frank.

"Of course I did, and we had a regular wordy war; and it might have ended in a fight, if the professor hadn't put in sight as he did. Oh, he makes me sick!" And Darry clenched his fists again.

"Glummy is angry because he thinks we have put him down as a coward for leaving St. Vincent in such a hurry," said Sam. "And when he is angry there is no telling what he will do."

"He had better leave Darry alone," came from Frank. "If he doesn't, I'll——"

"I guess I can take care of him, Frank."

"And that pitch joke—I'm mad about it yet," came from Mark.

"He shan't play any more jokes on me," said Sam.

It was the third day of the voyage, and the *Belle*

of the Sea was skirting the north coast of Venezuela. The weather the day before had been a trifle rough, and this had caused Hockley to become seasick, which put him in a worse humor than ever.

The steamer boasted of a Dutch steward, by the name of Hans Woden. He was a very willing fellow, but somewhat clumsy in his movements, and the boys had no end of sport with him. Woden now put in an appearance, and Frank at once hailed him.

"Hullo, Hans!" he cried. "How are you feeling this morning?"

"Putty goot!" was the slow answer. "How you feel yourselluf, hey?"

"I generally feel with my hands, thank you."

The Dutch steward stared blankly at the youth.

"You vos feel mit your hands, hey?" he murmured.

"So does Hans feel with his hands," laughed Sam.

"Yah, I feel mit mine hands efery dime. Put you vos ask me how I vos feels dis morning, hey?"

"Perhaps you are feeling with your feet this morning," observed Mark. "It's just as good."

"I ton't feel mit mine feet—dot is, ven I mine shoes haf on got." The Dutch steward closed one

eye, and poked Darry in the ribs. "Put maybe you your feets have got some feelings in ven you stand on dem dacks by yourselluf der staterooms in, hey, if I no dem dacks sweep owit, hey?"

"For gracious' sake, give it to me slower!" gasped Darry. "I never was any hand at solving Chinese puzzles."

"I said you vos feel py your feets of I no dem dacks have alretty out gesweeped pefore you to ped go, hey?" explained Woden innocently.

"All right if you say so, old fellow," murmured Darry. "But you had better write it out on paper and send the solution with it."

"I come to tole you about dot. Ven I der state-rooms gesweep dot vot it is I got. Dot der feets vos pad for, hey?"

He dove into the pocket of his jacket, and, after considerable trouble, brought forth a handful of long—carpet tacks!

"Tacks!" burst from all the boys.

"He means he found them on your stateroom floor when he was sweeping," added Mark.

"If that's so, Hans, where did they come from?" questioned Darry, sobering down, for he saw that something was in the wind.

"Da vos come by der floor from," answered the steward.

"Yes, I know; but who put them there?"

"I tole somebodies of you ton't tole somebodies," whispered Woden mysteriously.

"All right; I won't 'tole somebodies,'" laughed Darry.

"Dot Mr. Hockley vos set dem down by der floor up."

"Hockley!" came from all of the boys.

Hans Woden nodded gravely.

"How do you know this?" demanded Darry.

"I vos haf him geseen last efening, 'pout an hour after supper. I go der staterooms bast, und I look der insides in, und he vos der floor on, like dis."

Woden got down on his knees and began to set up a row of tacks on the deck. Then he swept the sharp-pointed things back into his hand.

"That was in my stateroom?" questioned Darry.

"Yah; right der ped in front of."

"And Hockley did it!" burst out Sam. "He was going to play another trick on you, Darry."

"You're right, Beans; but, thanks to Hans here, I escaped."

"And that is what has made Glummy so ugly this

morning," came from Mark. "He's sour because he was tripped up."

"I'll trip him up," muttered Darry, with a peculiar look in his eyes. "Just you wait and see how I square up with him." Darry turned to the steward. "I shan't forget you for this."

"Dot vos chust all right," returned Woden, who had taken a fancy to the fun-making youth; and then he turned away to attend to his duties.

About an hour after this the boys separated, Frank to compose a letter, Sam to write up a daily journal he had begun to keep, and Mark to develop some snap-shot photographs he had taken at St. Vincent and Trinidad. Mark had become deeply interested in photography, and now owned both a large and a small camera, as well as a complete portable outfit for developing, printing, and mounting.

Darry felt in no humor to do anything. The thought that Hockley had set up a lot of carpet tacks on his stateroom floor hung in his mind.

"I might have got stuck up pretty badly," he told himself. "I must square up for it—I can't afford to let it pass."

On the forward deck the ship's carpenter was repairing one of the small boats, which had become

damaged some time before. The job was almost done, and he was painting some of the new wood-work. He had pots of blue and white paint, and half a dozen brushes.

Darry paused to look on, and his eyes fell on the paint brushes. Several were almost new, but there was one large one which was worn down to little more than a stub. This the carpenter took up presently to throw overboard.

"Let me have that, please," cried Darry, struck by a sudden idea.

"Want to paint something?" said the carpenter, with a smile.

"Hardly, but I'd like to have the brush."

"All right, it's yours. It's a nice handle, but I've got all I want of 'em."

Taking the brush, Darry cleaned off the paint. Then with a large pair of scissors he cut what was left of the bristles into bits about half an inch long. These bits he wrapped up in a paper and put into his pocket.

Noon of that day was very hot, and it did not seem to cool off much when the sun went down. Even during the supper hour all perspired freely.

"This is the worst yet!" growled Hockley. "I feel if I was taking a Turkish bath."

"Well, there is no extra charge for the bath," returned Sam lightly.

"I wouldn't have come if I had known it was going to be so beastly hot."

"All right; the next time you come, stay behind," remark Frank dryly, and the bull made everybody but the lank youth laugh.

"This extra hot spell will not last," put in Professor Strong. "I was talking with Captain Rodrick, and he anticipates a fall of the thermometer inside of the next twenty-four hours."

As it was so warm, the boys did not care to turn in until late. Frank and Mark had a large stateroom together, while Sam, Darry, and Hockley occupied smaller compartments alone.

Darry kept an eye on Hockley, and as soon as the tall youth made a move to retire, the fun-loving boy nodded for the others to join him.

"I want you to come down to my stateroom," he said, in a low voice. "But don't let Hockley see you."

"Something doing?" queried Frank.

"Yes; but mum's the word."

So as soon as Hockley was in his stateroom the others tiptoed their way into Darry's compartment. That and Hockley's really belonged to a suite, but so far the door between had been kept closed and locked.

Listening, they heard Hockley pull off his clothing and prepare to retire. Being so warm, it is safe to assume that he went to bed clad very lightly. Then they heard the berth creak several times, as the occupant sought to make himself comfortable.

"Now hark!" whispered Darry. "He'll soon find he isn't lying on a bed of roses."

There was scarcely a moment of silence before they heard Hockley turn again, and then begin to scratch himself.

"What is making me itch so?" they heard him mutter. "I seem to be stuck full of needles! I believe the bed's full of bugs! Oh, my!" He began to scratch worse than ever. "My whole body is full of it! Something's in the bed—that's sure!" Then followed more scratching. "Oh, but this itches like fire! It's getting worse every minute! I believe somebody put something in this bed. What's this? Feels like the point of a pin. And here's another, and another! Oh! oh!"

He bounced off the berth, and they heard him dance around the stateroom floor, still scratching himself vigorously. It was only by an effort that the other boys could keep from screaming with laughter. Each grinned broadly.

"What is it?" whispered Frank.

"Paint-brush bristles," answered Darry. "I'll wager he feels as if he had fallen into a clump of nettles."

"Worse than carpet tacks," put in Mark; and then they clapped their hands over their mouths to keep from roaring.

"I'm going to tell the professor of this!" they heard Hockley mutter savagely. "I won't stand it! This is another of Darry Crane's jokes."

And then slipping on some of his clothing, Hockley rushed from the stateroom, banging the door after him.

CHAPTER VI

A STRANGE PRISON

"Now you are in for it," whispered Frank, as they heard Hockley rush away along the passageway.

"Let me settle this," replied Darry quickly. "You go to bed."

"But what will you do?"

Without replying, Darry produced a key and unlocked the door between the two staterooms.

Bringing out a pasteboard box which was handy, he whipped the bed-sheet from the berth Hockley had occupied, and shook the bits of bristles into the receptacle. Then he turned the sheet over and put it back, and rearranged the pillow and spreads. All this took but a couple of minutes, and soon he was back in his own room, and the door was locked as before.

"Let us all go to the forward deck," suggested Mark, for nobody had followed Darry's advice to go to bed.

The others were willing, and they slipped away, taking care to close the stateroom door after them. They ascended to the deck by a different way from that which the big youth had taken, and therefore did not encounter Hockley returning with Professor Strong.

In the meantime the bully had sought out the professor, and poured his tale of woe into the tutor's ears. The professor was skeptical, and half inclined to think some strange bugs had bitten Hockley.

"The tropics are full of gnats and other things, and they often get on shipboard," he said. "We'll investigate, to make sure."

In the stateroom both looked over the berth with care, but, try their best, nothing could be found but one or two tiny bristles, and the remains of a moth miller and several mosquitoes.

"I imagine it was the warmth," said Professor Strong. "You may be suffering from prickly-heat."

It must be confessed that the bully was as much mystified as was the professor.

"I think they've been playing a joke on me," he growled.

"I see no evidence of it," was the brief answer.

And then Professor Strong left, to finish a smoke he had been enjoying in company with Captain Rodrick.

Hockley retired once more, but it was a long while before he could get to sleep, for several of the tiny bristles still bothered him. He was just dozing off when Darry came down, whistling gayly to himself.

The sound of that whistle irritated Hockley fully as much as had the bristles, and soon he thumped upon the partition with his fist.

"Shut up in there!" he bellowed. "Can't you let a fellow sleep?"

"Oh, I didn't know you were awake," replied Darry innocently.

"I suppose not," was Hockley's sarcastic rejoinder. "Just the same, I know the trick you played on me, and I'll get square for it."

"Trick, Glummy? Why, you must be dreaming. I've been on deck——"

"Oh, you can't smooth it over, Darry Crane! You put something in my bed, and——"

"Was it pitch, Glummy, dear?"

"If you Glummy me any more, I'll come in there and thrash you!" roared the bully.

"Thank you; but you can't get in, as the door is locked. My advice to you is that you go to sleep. Perhaps in the morning your temper will be improved."

After that Darry refused to talk, fearing the professor would be brought to the spot by the conversation. Hockley continued to berate him, and also the others; but finally his words died away in a low grumble, and all became quiet.

The warm wave, as Frank called it, continued the next day, and the boys could think of nothing but to keep quiet in the shade. Not a bit of a breeze was blowing, and the only air they could get was on the forward deck as the *Belle of the Sea* plowed along on her way to the west. The sky was without a cloud, and even the seagulls had now deserted them.

"This puts me in mind of the time I was at the equator in the Pacific Ocean," said the professor. "The machinery on board had broken down, and for three days we lay on the bosom of the ocean, with the sun boiling down upon us. The tar ran from the cordage and oozed out of the seams of the deck, and it seemed that somebody would go crazy from the heat before we could continue our journey."

"That isn't as bad as the experience I had," put in Captain Rodrick. "It was my second trip on the *Hollyhock*, a three-master, bound for the west coast of Africa. We struck a calm while close to the equator, and didn't get a capful of air for seven days. The drinking water was bad, and on the fifth day one of the sailors went crazy and leaped overboard, and we had all we could do to save him. He fought like a demon, declaring that the ship was burning up, and we had to strap him down and put ice on him."

"And did he get over it at last?" questioned Sam.

"He did, after a fashion. But he was always a bit queer in his head afterwards."

It was not in Darry's nature to remain quiet long, and presently he got up to take a walk around the steamer. Frank accompanied him. As they moved along the deck they came upon the Spanish passenger, who sat smoking a black cigar and eying them curiously. They had been introduced to Manuel Nonti, but so far had had little to say to him.

"Gooda-morning," said the Spaniard.

"Good-morning," answered both boys, and nodded pleasantly.

"Plenty hotta deesa morning," went on Manuel Nonti. "Hotta like de fire, eh?"

"It's too hot," laughed Darry. "But I thought you were used to it. I believe you said you came from Nicaragua."

"No hotta like dees where I a-comma from. Live in de mountains. Nice breeze dare."

"Oh, I see. I thought you came from Greytown."

"No; I comma from de Lake Nicaragua. Owna de boat dere. You go-a de lake, maybe."

"We expect to get to the lake sometime," put in Frank, and he pinched Darry's arm.

"You comma de lake, you rida on my boat," went on Manuel Nonti.

"We'll see," said Darry, and then they moved on.

"I don't like the looks of that fellow," was Frank's comment, when they were out of hearing.

"Nor I, Frank. To me he looks like some of the old-fashioned Italian and Mexican brigands we used to read about."

"That's it exactly. And yet he may be as honest as the day is long."

"True. But a chap can't help but be impressed by his feelings."

"I don't think I'd care to ride on his boat."

"Nor I, especially if he's got a crew as villainous-looking as himself."

Being on such good terms with Captain Rodrick, the boys felt that they could go almost anywhere on the ship. They had already struck up an acquaintance with many of the officers and several of the crew, and would have visited the engineer, only the engine room was altogether too hot for them. Looking below, they saw the engineer at his post, wearing nothing but a shirt and trousers; and the firemen, wearing only trousers, and with their bodies dripping and begrimed by coal dust, looked like some imps from the infernal region.

"They earn every dollar they get," observed Frank, as he and Darry drew back to avoid the hot blast that welled up. "I shouldn't want that job for ten dollars an hour."

"I doubt if you could stand it for an hour, Frank. The thermometer must be at a hundred and twenty or thirty down there."

"Let us get to some cooler place."

"I'm willing, but where?"

"There goes Hans Woden, with a cake of ice. Where did he get that?"

"From the hold, I suppose, or else out of the big refrigerator. Sam told me they had a refrigerator on board which was as big as a fair-sized room."

"Then let us go and look at that. Perhaps we can step inside and cool off."

While the boys were talking they were walking through a passageway leading to one of the cabins. In a nook sat Hockley, devouring one of the sensational stories he had brought along. They did not notice him, but he saw them, and heard part of what was said.

"Oh, how I'd like to square accounts with Darry and the others!" he muttered to himself.

He was in a most exciting part of the novel,—where the boy hero was holding at bay six armed train robbers,—but the story seemed suddenly to lose its flavor. He put the pamphlet in his pocket, and followed Frank and Darry, doing his best, however, not to attract their attention.

At length the two boys reached the cook's galley. Back of this was a small storeroom, and in the rear of this the refrigerator mentioned. As the boys approached they saw one of the cook's helpers come from the refrigerator with a large cut of beef, meant for the next meal.

"Can we look in?" questioned Darry.

"Certainly, sir," was the answer; "but don't leave the door open too long."

The helper went off, and Frank and Darry walked up to the refrigerator, which had a heavy oaken door, with a big brass catch and handle. It took nearly all of Frank's strength to pull the door open.

"It's thicker than the door to my father's biggest safe," said the youth.

"They have to have the refrigerator walls thick, to keep in the cold and keep out the heat," returned Darry, as he stepped inside.

Frank followed, and both boys gazed curiously at the many shelves, laden with provisions, and at the hooks filled with meat and poultry.

"What a lot of stuff they have to carry, even for such a trip as this!" was Frank's comment.

"I suppose they have to be prepared for accidents. If the ship was disabled, we might drift around for days and days before we reached a port or sighted some other vessel."

"That's so. How cold it is! I don't advise remaining long. It may give us a chill."

"Yes; the change is too great for comfort. If we—— What's that?"

Darry broke off short as a form appeared near the doorway. Then the door began to swing shut.

“Cool off, and see how you like it!” came to their ears, in Hockley’s voice.

And then the door shut with a bang, they heard the catch fall into place, and they found themselves prisoners in the darkness.

CHAPTER VII

TURNING THE TABLES

"It was Hockley who shut that door!" cried Frank, as he clutched Darry's arm.

"I know it. I suppose it's a trick to square up for that trick last night."

Both boys leaped to the door and tried to push it open.

But the wooden barrier was smooth on the inside, and locked without, and refused to budge.

"We are in a pickle, and no mistake," groaned Frank.

"It's a mighty cold pickle," returned Darry.
"And it is getting colder every instant."

"If we had a light, it wouldn't be so bad."

"It can't be that he intends to keep us here long. Why, it would be the death of us!"

A match was struck, and gazing around they found a candlestick which was used to light up the dark corners of the great refrigerator when putting in and taking out stuff.

By this time the two boys felt decidedly chilly, for they were, as we know, thinly clad, and with the door closed the cold current of air was strong in the ice-box.

"We'll be frozen stiff if we stay here much longer," muttered Frank, his teeth chattering.

Both beat and kicked upon the door—not once, but a dozen times. Yet nobody came to answer their summons.

"This is getting se—se-rious!" chattered Darry. "I f-f-feel as if I was taking an i-i-i-ice bath!" And he shook from head to feet.

"Hockley ought to be hanged for this," returned Frank. He was leaning over the candle trying to draw some of the hot air into his lungs. "It's enough to give us both pneumonia, if nothing worse."

Ten minutes passed. To the boys the time seemed hours. Both were blue with cold, and shook from head to foot. Again they rushed at the door, hammering more loudly than ever. Then they listened.

"Mine cracious! Vot vos der matter der ice-pox inside?" came in Hans Woden's voice. "Some of dem animals alife must have got vonce more."

"Help! Let us out!" came from both boys.
"We are freezing to death!"

The Dutch steward now made out voices and quickly stepped to the door, which was unclasped and thrown back. Out staggered Frank and Darry, still chattering.

"Vot, you poys vos der ice-pox in!" gasped Woden. "How you vos der door shut on yourselves, hey?"

"We did—didn't shut th—the d-d-door!" chattered Frank.

"Talk about cu—cu—cooling off!" gasped Darry. "I feel as if I'd bu-bu-been living on icicles!"

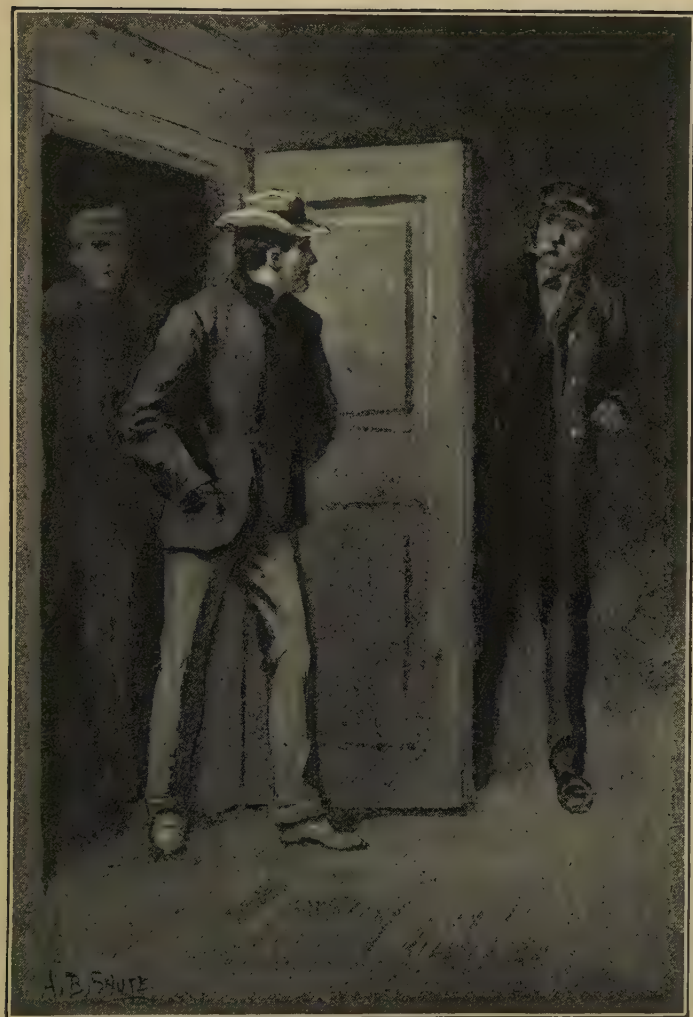
"It was too pad der door vos shut geblowed," was Hans Woden's comment. "Maybe you vos some hot coffee trink, hey?"

"Yes, give us each a cup of hot coffee," answered Frank.

"Wonder if Glummy is around," muttered Darry.
"If he is I'll warm up by thrashing him!"

They looked on all sides, and even on the deck, but Hockley was nowhere in sight.

"He meant to leave us in there," said Frank, his



Out staggered Frank and Darry. — Page 60.

face growing serious. "Darry, it might have killed us!"

"Oh, I don't believe he meant to go so far. He knew the refrigerator would be opened sooner or later."

"A half-hour would have laid us out stiff."

"I believe you."

Woden now brought the coffee and the two boys gulped it down as hot as their throats could stand it. This put them in an immediate perspiration; and danger from being exposed to the extreme cold became a thing of the past.

"We ought to tell the professor of this," said Frank. "It is carrying the thing too far. Hockley hasn't come back and that shows he meant to leave us to our fate."

"I've got an idea, Frank. We'll pay Hockley back by giving him a big scare."

"How?"

"By keeping out of sight."

"Perhaps he knows we are out already."

"I don't think so. Anyway, we can try it. We'll send Woden for Mark and Sam and talk it over."

The Dutch steward was called and sent on the errand. It was not long before he returned accompanied by Mark and Sam.

"Well, if that doesn't beat all!" ejaculated Mark, after listening to their tale. "Certainly he ought to be thrashed. If you don't catch a sickness from this it won't be Glummy's fault."

"What do you want us to do?" questioned Sam.

"Want you to put him in misery, Beans," answered Darry, and now for the first time since coming out of the refrigerator his face bore a grin.

"Put him in misery?"

"Exactly. I've got a little plan and if it works it will pay Jacob Hockley back with interest."

"We ought to collar him and pitch him into the ice-box," came from Mark. "He needs cooling off."

"No, my plan isn't that," returned Darry.

And then he told them what his plan was, to which they listened with deep interest.

In the meantime Hockley had gone off in great glee and was now sitting in a secluded corner of the deck chuckling to himself.

"That's the time I got square with 'em," he muttered to himself. "Oh, my, but won't they be half

frozen before anybody lets them out! I'll wager they won't forget it in a hurry."

The picture in his mind made him laugh outright. Certainly it was the best joke he had played yet. And it was original, too—not taken from any of the "comic libraries" he had read. He fairly felt like hugging himself.

But as the time slipped by his face took a serious turn. What if nobody came to let them out? Would they really be frozen to death? Or, if not that, would they be taken seriously sick? At these thoughts the lank youth became considerably disturbed. If anything like that happened there would be an investigation and then——

Hockley was on the point of walking back to where the refrigerator was located when the gong sounded for the mid-day meal. He had moved only a short distance across the deck when Professor Strong joined him.

"Time for lunch, Jacob," said the professor, with a smile. "Come, we will go to the dining saloon."

"Ye—yes, sir," was the hesitating answer.

"It doesn't seem to be quite as warm as it was an hour ago."

"No, sir."

"What have you been doing with yourself this morning?"

"Oh, nothing much, sir—just lying around. It was too hot to stir."

"That is true. But I thought I saw you walking around the cook's galley."

No more was said, and soon the pair was in the dining saloon, where they found Manuel Nonti already seated. The Spaniard was always on hand for meals and his appetite was little short of astonishing. He said a few words to Professor Strong, and the latter replied briefly. The tutor did not like the man any more than did his pupils.

"Where are the other boys?" questioned the professor, as the waiter came in with the first course.

"I—I don't know, sir," answered Hockley, and a guilty flush stole over his face.

He had scarcely spoken when Sam and Mark came in chatting gayly.

"Hullo, we thought we were the last to come in," remarked Sam, as he dropped into his chair.

"Thought Frank said he was so hungry this morning," returned Mark. "Breakfast must have filled him up."

"It is queer the others do not come," remarked

Professor Strong. "Do you know where they are, Hockley?"

"N—no, sir."

"I have told them to be prompt at meals. They ought to know the rule by this time."

"Say, Sam, what was that story you started to tell me last night, when the captain interrupted us?" asked Mark while eating. He spoke in a low voice, but loud enough for Hockley to hear.

"Oh, it was something I'd been reading in the paper about a butcher in Boston we used to deal with. It was certainly too bad."

"What about him?"

"Oh, it seems he went into his ice-box one evening to put away the last of his meat and the door closed on him in such a way that he couldn't open it from the inside. He was alone in his shop at the time, his clerk having gone home. Some time later the policeman on that beat found the door unlocked and the light burning. He thought something was wrong and he called the clerk, who lived on the next block. When the clerk got there he opened the ice-box and they found the poor butcher frozen stiff."

"Dead?"

"He wasn't quite dead. They took him to the

hospital and had to cut off his legs and one arm to save his life, I think."

"Oh!" Mark gave a shiver. "What a story to tell! I'm sorry I heard it."

During the talk neither of the boys appeared to notice Hockley. But from the corners of their eyes they saw him shift uneasily. Of course the story was nothing but a "yarn," gotten up by Darry, but poor Hockley did not understand it so. The bully looked sharply at the pair, but they went on eating as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

"It is queer that Dartworth and Samuel do not come," murmured the professor presently.

Hockley had been growing paler and paler. His hand shook, and some food on his fork was scattered on the table.

"Ex—excuse me!" he faltered. "I—I don't feel very well." And he arose.

"Why, what's the matter?" demanded Professor Strong, in astonishment.

"I—I guess I'm a—a bit seasick," was the stammered-out reply, and without further words Hockley hurried from the dining saloon.

Mark and Sam looked at each other and both could not repress the laugh that arose to their

lips. Professor Strong was more astonished than ever.

“Boys! boys!” he cried. “I sincerely trust you are not laughing at poor Jacob’s sudden spell of seasickness.”

“Oh, no, sir,” answered Mark. “It’s something quite different.” And then he nudged Sam in the ribs.

“Let up!” whispered the boy from Boston. “Let up, or I’ll burst, I know I shall!”

And then both roared outright, causing Professor Strong more amazement than ever.

CHAPTER VIII

ACROSS THE CARIBBEAN SEA

THERE was no doubt of it, Hockley was badly scared. He felt that he should have gone to see about Darry and Frank before sitting down to eat. Sam's harrowing tale of the butcher brought before him a vision of Darry and Frank lying stiff and silent at the bottom of the refrigerator. Was it possible that they were dead, or would they be so badly frozen that they would have to have arms or legs amputated? The thought was so terrifying it fairly made his teeth chatter.

"I was a fool to let it go so long," he muttered. "If they suffer much they'll tell their parents, and I'll be arrested and most likely sent to prison."

With all speed he ran to the cook's galley and through this to where the refrigerator was located. Nobody was near the big box, and throwing back the brass clasp he caught hold of the handle and gave a strong pull.

The door refused to budge!

The cold sweat stood out on Hockley's forehead as he tugged and hauled at the door. Then his heart almost stopped beating as a muffled groan reached his ears.

"They are in there still, nearly dead, and I can't open the door!" he murmured, shaking as with the ague. "What can be the matter with it?"

He looked, and now for the first time noticed that just below the handle was a keyhole. Evidently somebody had locked the door—and without letting the two boys out!

Another groan, deeper than the first, caused his knees to fairly knock together. They must be dying—they would be dead if he did not get them out instantly! Oh, the awful folly of it all in locking them in the refrigerator in the first place! Already he could see them lying stiff and cold before him, and see himself being hurried off to prison for the terrible crime.

Rushing to the galley, he fairly pounced upon the cook, who was busy preparing some sort of curry.

"Give me the key—the key to the ice-box!" he fairly screamed. "Be quick!"

"Why, what's the matter with you?" demanded the cook coolly. "Are you crazy?"

"No! no! Somebody is locked in that box! We must open it at once."

"I haven't time to bother now—this food will burn," and the cook, who had been let into the secret, turned his back on the youth.

Nearly frantic, Hockley caught up a bunch of keys hanging on a nearby nail. He was sure one must fit the lock of the refrigerator, and off he ran with them, to try one after the other as rapidly as his nervous hands would permit. And in the meanwhile another groan smote him to the very heart.

"Oh, what luck! I'll never get it open!" he muttered. "Oh, why did I ever try to play such a joke as this?"

At last he found the right key, and the door was unfastened. He gave a jerk that nearly sent him on his back as the door responded readily to his touch. Then he gazed into the refrigerator with staring eyes.

As it was dark inside, he could see but little. He took several steps forward.

"Frank! Darry!" he called softly, and stopped short. What was that? A laugh—a merry laugh? Or was it the ghostly laugh of somebody dead? He wheeled around, almost stunned. Another laugh,

louder than the first, and he caught a brief glimpse of Frank and Darry, as they sped away from behind the door of the cook's galley, where they had been in hiding.

It would be hard to state what Hockley's exact feelings were at that moment. For a brief instant he felt thankful that they had escaped; the next he was furiously mad at the manner in which they had tricked him.

"That butcher yarn was a fake!" he muttered, clenching his fists. "It was a fake, and told especially for my benefit! And I, like a fool, swallowed the bait, hook and all! How all of them will laugh at this!" He grated his teeth in impotent rage. "Oh, I'll get square, mark my words—I'll get square, if I die for it!"

"What do you want in my ice-box?" demanded the cook, coming toward him, with a grin on his broad face.

"Nothing," answered the tall youth abruptly.

"Then you had better keep out of it in the future, or you may get into trouble," added the cook significantly.

Hockley lost no time in leaving the spot. He was about to return to the dining saloon, but when near

the doorway he paused. Looking in, he saw Frank and Darry sitting at the table, stowing away their food and chatting gayly with Mark, Sam, and the professor. His appetite had failed him before—now it was completely gone.

“I’m not going in there to be laughed at,” he thought. “I’ll slip in and get something after they are through.” And that was what he did.

The boys had a good laugh over the joke, and it was a long hour before they got through discussing it.

“Glummy will remember it,” said Sam. “You fellows want to be on guard.”

“We will be, Beans,” answered Darry. “No more ice-box prisons for me.”

“Do you think the professor suspects?”

“No.”

But in this surmise Darry was mistaken. Professor Strong did suspect, but as nothing came directly to his notice, he let the matter pass.

The weather proved fine after the hot spell, and the boys enjoyed every hour of the trip. One beautiful afternoon they passed the island of Curaçao, and they spoke of their stop at that point, as already related in “Lost on the Orinoco.”

"Here is where Hockley had his first trouble with that Dan Markel," observed Mark. "What a lot of trouble he has had since!"

"Yes, and it's been his own fault," returned Frank. "If he wasn't so headstrong and so dictatorial, we might get along first-rate."

"I'm sorry for him in one way," came from Sam, with a serious look on his face. "He hasn't a chum in the crowd, and he must feel awfully lonely at times."

There was a moment of silence, for Sam's serious way of speaking impressed them.

"It is too bad not to have a chum of some sort," came slowly from Darry. "To tell the truth, I couldn't stand this live-all-by-yourself way."

"Well, if he would only meet us halfway——" began Mark.

"That's it, but he won't. He either wants to be leader or nothing—and I won't be led by such a fellow," was Frank's remark.

There was another pause. It was impossible to say what had done it, but in some manner the boys felt thoughtful that afternoon. The sight of Curaçao had put them in mind of the start of this trip.

How much had they seen since then, and how many perils had been passed in safety!

"I've got a plan," went on Sam slowly, as if doubtful how his words would be received.

"A plan for what?" came from the three others.

"A plan for taking a fresh start."

"You mean with Hockley?" came from Mark.

"Yes."

"It can't be done," put in Darry quickly. "You can't make a mince pie out of turnips."

There was a short laugh at this sally, but the others immediately became grave again.

"We might give Hockley another chance," said Sam. "I am willing to do it."

"But how are you going at it?" questioned Frank. "If you say a word to him now he'll fly up like a—a——"

"Chicken on a hot stove," finished Darry. "Oh, I know Glummy. When he isn't sour he's bitter. All of you know that."

"We might talk it over with him," suggested Mark slowly. "It wouldn't do any harm. Then we'd know for certain whether it was going to be friends or enemies."

"But supposing he refused?" interposed Frank.

"It would make me sick to think I had got down on my knees to him."

"There is no need of your getting down on your knees," came from Sam. "We could have a straight talk, that's all. We could tell him that we were willing to bury the past and take a fresh start. If he flies up, why, that will end it."

A discussion lasting nearly an hour followed. Darry was the last to give in, for he felt that the refrigerator trick had come close to ending seriously for himself and Frank. But finally he agreed to be guided by what the others might do.

"We needn't hurry the matter," said Sam. "We can wait until to-morrow morning, and then see what frame of mind Glummy seems to be in;" and so it was agreed.

So far, since the ice-box trick, Hockley had avoided the others, only joining them at meal-times, and then saying nothing more than was absolutely necessary. But that evening he appeared more cheerful than usual, and spoke quite pleasantly to Sam and Mark.

"He'll be all right to tackle in the morning," said Sam.

"I hope so," replied Frank.

"To my mind, you have got to beware of Glummy when he is pleasant," put in Darry.

"Oh, you're prejudiced," laughed Sam, who did not want to see his plan fall through.

That evening the boys sat for a long while listening to some stories Professor Strong and Captain Rodrick had to tell. At first Hockley was not with the crowd, but he came later, and appeared in a more cheerful frame of mind than ever.

For some reason Darry felt sleepy, and he started to retire directly the story-telling was over. Going to his stateroom, he began to undress in the dark, thinking the lamp would make the apartment too hot.

But his thoughts were on Hockley, and wandered back to the time he had placed the brush bristles in the big youth's bed.

"Guess I'd better take a look around," he murmured to himself when ready to lie down, and, striking a match, he lit the lamp for that purpose.

Everything about the stateroom and the berth seemed to be all right, and he was on the point of blowing out the lamp, when a thin thread suspended above the pillow of the berth attracted his attention.

"Only a thread!" he mused, and then uttered a

low whistle. The thread was fastened to the pillow by a bent pin, and the upper end ran to a shelf over the top of the bed. On the shelf rested a bit of newspaper, and behind this was an uncorked bottle of ink, with the thread tied firmly around the neck!

CHAPTER IX

THE BOYS COME TO TERMS

“WELL, I’ll be jiggered!”

Such was the exclamation which escaped Darry’s lips, as he gazed on the trap that had been set for him.

In a twinkling he realized the truth. Hockley had fixed this thing, and done it in such a manner that, had it not been discovered in time, the ink must have been pulled down on him the moment his head touched that pillow.

“And I would have been a pretty sight, with my face and whole head blackened, not to mention the berth linen,” murmured Darry. “This is surely the worst yet.”

Then his thoughts rushed to the others. Had they been served the same way?

“I’ll find out, before it is too late,” he told himself, and slipped back into his clothing with all speed.

He first went to the stateroom occupied by Frank and Mark jointly. He found them undressing in the dark.

"Hullo! What do you want?" questioned Frank.

"Strike a light, and be careful," answered Darry. "Hockley tried to play a trick on me, and I want to find out if he wants to serve you the same way."

The lamp was lit and an examination begun. True enough, over Frank's berth—the upper one—another bottle full of ink was suspended.

"What a dose—if I had caught it!" cried Frank indignantly.

"That shows how much you are going to subdue Jake the Glum," answered Darry dryly. "But hold on; I've got to see Sam."

He ran out and into Sam's stateroom. He found the boy from Boston already in his berth. A search revealed nothing wrong. The four boys assembled in the apartment occupied by Mark and Frank.

"He intended to square up with you and Frank," said Mark to Darry. "It was certainly a dirty kind of a trick."

To this the others agreed, and an excited conversation ensued. In the midst of this Frank suddenly held up his hand and motioned with his head toward the door.

"He is spying!" he whispered.

"Let's haul him in!" ejaculated Darry, and running to the door he flung it open.

His action was so rapid that Hockley, who was indeed at the door, had no time to retreat. The lank youth was bending down toward the keyhole, and a quick haul on the shoulder by Darry sent him sprawling into the stateroom.

"Hi—you—let me up!" stammered Hockley sheepishly.

"Shut the door and lock it!" came from Darry, and at once Frank started to do so.

"Don't you dare to lock me in here!" fumed Hockley, struggling to his feet. "Don't you dare!"

"We want to talk to you," answered Frank, and by this time he had the door closed and locked, and the key in his pocket.

"I won't stay!"

"You'll have to stay," answered Darry.

"Will I? Not much! Just you open that door."

And now the bully advanced upon Frank with clenched fists.

"Hold on! Don't you dare strike Frank!" interposed Mark, placing himself between the pair.

"He had no right to lock that door."

"You had no right to play the eavesdropper," came from Sam.

"And you had no right to try to cover me with ink," added Darry.

"Or lock us in the refrigerator," continued Frank.

"Well, who started to play jokes? I didn't," growled Hockley, his face growing unusually sour.

Darry and Frank started to speak at once, but Sam held his hand up and silenced them.

"Boys," he said, slowly and distinctly, "let us get together right now."

Darry and Frank stared hard at him.

"What! after this ink——" began Darry.

"Yes, Darry. Why not? If you continue, we'll all get into serious trouble with the professor."

"But Glummy——"

"That's right; blame me for everything," howled the one referred to savagely. "Didn't I say you are

all down on me? Oh, what wouldn't I give to be out of this crowd——”

“Just now, I suppose,” finished Darry dryly.

“Oh, I am not afraid of you, even though you are four to one. But I mean for good. I am more than sick of it.”

“See here, Jake, let me do some talking,” said Sam in the kindest tone he could command. “Promise me you will listen to what I have to say.”

“What do you want?”

“Will you listen?”

“Aint I listening now?”

“But I want you to listen until I have finished. We talked it over between us this afternoon, and we came to the conclusion that this enmity between yourself and us was a senseless thing. We are not going to say who is to blame, or who started it. The five of us came down here with Professor Strong to see the sights and have a good time. We could have a much better time all around if we were friends. Now, what we propose is, that all hands bury the hatchet, and take a fresh start.”

“Huh! And how long will it last? Until you see a good chance to pitch into me again.”

“We will promise to do our best to avoid trouble,

if you will promise the same. Isn't that right, fellows?"

"That is what we agreed to," came from Mark.

"Well, I'm willing," added Frank.

Then those who had spoken gazed at Darry, whose face was a study.

"Well, I was willing, too," said he. "But this ink trick——"

"Let it go, Darry," whispered Sam.

"All right; I'll let it pass, if you insist."

"There, you see how it is, Jake," continued the Boston boy. "What do you say? Shall it be friends?"

He stepped up to Hockley, and held out his hand. The bully looked at first one and then another of the party. He was more than astonished, and gradually a trace of suspicion crept into his face.

"Maybe this is another of your tricks," he growled.

"No; I give you my word it is no trick," answered Sam. "We are willing to meet you halfway, bury the past, and be friends. Come, you can't refuse such an offer, Jake."

Once more Sam held out his hand, and now the lank youth took it, slowly and cautiously, as though

half expecting he would be stung or cut. Then he coughed nervously.

"All right, I'm willing," he said in a low voice, and dropped the hand after one brief shake.

"Then shake hands all around, Jake, and from this hour on consider yourself one of us!" cried Sam, happy to know that his plan of reconciliation had not fallen through.

Hockley grew red in the face as he took first one hand and then another. Darry's was the last.

"All right, Jake; it's quits," said the fun-loving youth. "You played the last joke,—or tried to play it,—but we'll let it go. I guess Sam is right; we'll be better off to pull together after this."

There was an awkward pause, for Hockley tried to say something, but only ended in an unintelligible murmur. Then several of the others began to talk at once, in an endeavor to "break the ice" more thoroughly. Five minutes later they were all talking as a lively set of youths will.

"I don't deny I was scared after I locked you in the refrigerator," declared Hockley presently. "I oughtn't to have kept you in there longer than a minute or two. And I was hopping mad when I found you were working on my feelings. That is

why I fixed the ink bottles. If I hadn't been so mad I shouldn't have tried to play such a trick as that. 'Just the same, you put something in my berth the other night,' he continued, with a sickly grin.

"Bygones are bygones!" sang out Darry. "After this we'll all have fun together, and at the expense of the outsiders."

"So say we all of us!" sang out Mark. And then of a sudden he added: "Boys, for the sake of old times, everybody join in, even if it's only one verse."

And then in his sweet tenor voice he began singing a song which they had sung hundreds of times before, during their days at Lakeview Academy:

" ' Then here's to the winner
And he who has lost,
They fought well the battle,
Not counting the cost ;
We're friends altogether,
So raise up a cheer—
Hip, hip, and hurrah,
For everyone here ! ' "

All joined in, filling the stateroom with their singing, and after the verse was ended, Darry led off in the old academy yell:

“ ‘ L and an A and a K and an E !
Lake, lake, lake, lake, lake !
V and an I and an E W,
View, view, view, view, view !
Lakeview ! Lakeview !
Sis, sis, sis, book-laker, book-laker,
Bang!
Lakeview Academy ! Hurrah ! ’ ”

Dear old Lakeview Academy ! Amid all their travels they would never forget the happy days spent at that institution of learning.

CHAPTER X

ON SHORE ONCE MORE

"You boys did some lively singing last night," remarked Professor Strong to Mark on the following morning.

"Oh, we were celebrating a little love feast," answered Mark lightly.

"Was Jacob Hockley there?"

"Yes, sir." Mark paused awkwardly. "You see, Sam brought it about. We've buried the hatchet and taken a fresh start."

"Indeed! I am very glad to hear it," and the professor's face showed his sincere satisfaction. "I am only sorry it did not happen before. I trust you have no further differences."

This was all Professor Strong said, either to Mark or the others. He knew Mark would tell the others, and he was not in the habit of "preaching," as we well know.

"It did us good to sing the old songs," went on

Mark presently. "Took us back to some jolly days."

"Yes, Mark, they were good days. I think after this trip is ended I shall return to teaching there."

"I wish I was going back. But I'll have to prepare for college."

"Yes, and so will some of the others, I suppose. Well, make the best of this trip while it lasts."

Mark's talk was reported and gave all the others much satisfaction, even Hockléy being pleased. The lads walked up and down the deck arm in arm, much to the astonishment of Hans Woden, who happened to catch sight of them.

"Dem vos funny poys," said Woden to the cook. "Da do dings py each der udder more as six dimes alretty und den da lofe each der udder chust der same alretty aftervards."

"It's a good thing they have patched up a friendship," replied the cook. "Otherwise they would have raised Cain on the steamer for the balance of the trip."

One day after another slipped by. The *Belle of the Sea* had been delayed somewhat by "thick" weather, but Captain Rodrick promised that twenty-four hours more would land them at Greytown.

"And I won't be sorry to stretch my legs on land once more," remarked Frank.

At sunrise on the next day the boys arose early. Reaching the deck Frank gave a cry and swung his hat into the air.

"Land! land! Dead ahead!"

He was right—out of the blue mists of the sea arose an irregular outline of mountains in the distance, with some patches of forests a little closer.

"That can't be the shore line," said Sam. "The professor said it was flat."

"Those are mountains back of the shore," said Captain Rodrick, who happened to hear the remark. "The shore is decidedly flat and uninviting."

Inside of an hour they could make out the land, which lay between the sea and the mountains. It was flat, with here and there a small hill. There were immense stretches of tropical grass and dense undergrowths. Not a building was in sight.

"Where is Greytown?" questioned Darry. "If that is where we are going to land it should be somewhere about here."

"Greytown is situated on a lagoon back of the sea," said the professor. "The captain said we could not see it from where he is going to anchor."

"Then we can't run in?" queried Hockley.

"Oh, no, there is a bar which is very dangerous. A small boat will take us ashore. They are hoisting the signal for one now."

The flags were being run up under Captain Rodrick's directions. In the meantime the *Belle of the Sea* had continued on her course until they could see the flat beach quite plainly. Between the ship and the beach was the bar, over which the waves dashed and pounded with a wild and uncanny roar.

"Say, are we going ashore there?" asked Hockley in dismay.

"Yes, Jacob," answered the professor. "But do not be alarmed. I am sure Captain Rodrick will see to it that we pass in without mishap." But he did not add that the bar is highly dangerous at times, and that more than one landsman or sailor had lost his life there through the power of the surf.

The signals for a small boat had been seen, and presently from around a wooded headland a tug came puffing out, making straight for the bar. For several minutes the tiny craft seemed lost in the mists and the flying spray, then she emerged triumphantly and steamed up alongside of the larger vessel.

"Passengers to go ashore," cried Captain Rodrick. "Regular rate, I suppose?"

"How many?" came from the tug.

"Six."

"Regular rate, and only one trunk apiece."

The talk was listened to by Professor Strong, and he turned to the boys.

"Get ready to go ashore," he said. "And get your trunks ready too, and your grips."

"I no goa on da tug," put in Manuel Nonti. "I goa wid de freight on da lighter. He costa me noddings."

"Thanks, but I don't care to wait for a freight lighter," replied Darry, who had been addressed, and he ran off to prepare for the transfer.

Manuel Nonti gazed after the boy and his companions thoughtfully.

"They have money in plenty," he thought. "Too much money. I must tell Cousin Ramon of this. Perhaps we can help them to spend some." And he laughed darkly to himself.

It was no easy matter to transfer the passengers and their baggage to the deck of the tug, which rejoiced in a name which was, according to Darry, as long as the craft itself. The trunks and bags

were lowered by aid of a yard and tackle, and our friends went down in the same manner, one at a time.

"Talk about your swings!" cried light-hearted Darry. "This beats 'em all. If you drop and miss it you have about two miles of ocean to fall into."

"Don't you drop me into the sea," exclaimed Hockley, when it was his turn. "The captain says there are sharks around, and I don't want to furnish them with a meal."

"Are there sharks here?" questioned Frank.

"To be sure," answered Professor Strong. "All tropical waters are full of them. But he is perfectly safe if he looks out for himself."

At last all were transferred to the tug and the trip shoreward was begun, Captain Rodrick shouting a farewell and promising to see them in Greytown later. Then the little craft turned about and headed for the bar.

It must be confessed that the boys were more or less nervous. The tug sat down low in the sea, and from such a point the surf as it dashed high at the bar looked more formidable than ever. Moreover, the waves appeared to be running unusually strong.

"If we once go overboard, we'll never get out again," said Sam, in a low voice.

"Hold fast, all of you," came in a warning from the professor. "Perhaps you had better go inside."

"No, if we go down I'm not going to die like a rat in a trap," answered Hockley, and his voice proved that he was trembling.

In a few minutes they were in the very midst of the surf. The air was filled with mist and flying spray, and they were almost blinded. Up and down plunged the tiny craft, the engines working furiously in a battle royal with the elements. For a moment the headway was checked, but then they went on, and the breaking waves caught them in the rear.

"Oh!" came from Frank, as he received a dash in the left ear. But now the danger was past and the tug glided on as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. Soon they were running into a tiny bay, skirted at certain points with banks of sand and a stunted growth of tropical brushwood. Then they took another turn or two up into the mouth of the river and onward to the Greytown Lagoon.

"Hurrah! There is the town!" cried Mark, as a collection of low houses appeared before them.

"Not so very much of a city," remarked Sam, in a somewhat disappointed tone of voice.

"Greytown is nothing more than a shipping point," said the professor. "Only people with business live here, for it rains about four days out of five the year around. You'll see very little dust until you get further westward."

"It is certainly not very large," said Mark.

"I have heard that there are about sixteen hundred inhabitants. When the Canal Company was at work on the river nearby there used to be a great many more people here, and San Juan del Norte, as the natives call the city, experienced something of a boom. Even yet, according to native standards, it is prosperous, but to an up-to-date American,—or rather Yankee, for these natives are Americans as well as we,—it is slow."

There was no trouble in landing, and soon all were ashore. A native cart was procured and into this their trunks were dumped and they took their way to the single hotel of which the place boasted, a modest affair fronting the plaza, or public square.

"Well, this looks pretty enough," declared Frank, an hour later, as he stood at the window of his room in the hotel. Before him was a clean and well-

kept square, with a smooth lawn and trim-looking tropical bushes and trees. There were numerous flowers, and not a few birds, and over all hung the dreamy balm of a typical noon in the tropics.

“It’s all right—only I wouldn’t want too much of it,” answered Mark, who was washing up for lunch.

“Hullo, there is our fellow passenger, Manuel Nonti!” exclaimed Frank, gazing up the roadway. “He must have followed us at once.”

“It isn’t Nonti,” answered Mark, coming to the window. “But it looks a good deal like him.”

The man walking along came closer, and Frank saw that he had made a mistake. “You’re right, it isn’t he,” he said, and then continued after a pause: “Do you know, Mark, I didn’t like that Spaniard at all.”

“Nor I, Frank. He had a sly look that made me keep on my guard whenever he was around. I don’t want to meet him again.”

“Nor I,” came from Frank; and there the subject was dropped.

But they were destined to meet Manuel Nonti again, and more than once, and also meet the man who had just passed beneath their window.

CHAPTER XI

AN ADVENTURE ON MULEBACK

THE boys had not been in Greytown long before they discovered that the population was a very mixed one, in which negroes and Indians, the latter from the Mosquito Reservation, formed a large part. There were many natives, of pure and mixed Spanish blood, and a goodly handful of Americans, Frenchmen, Englishmen, and Germans.

The town, as said before, was rather picturesque, with its palm and breadfruit trees, and its sleepy plaza, fronted with shops, at which trading went on in the usual slow fashion common to Central and South America. But there was plenty to buy, and they were surprised to find prices low.

"Things are a good deal cheaper here than they were in Caracas," observed Mark to Sam, after purchasing some novelties which he intended to send home.

"I guess they haven't got onto the method of

cheating the Yankee yet," laughed Sam. "In most places, not only down here but also in Europe, they think a Yankee is made of money, so I have heard."

"Well, we are certainly better off than the people of most nations."

"That's true, Mark; no better and more prosperous country in the whole world than our own United States."

Not far from the town was what had once been a settlement belonging to the Canal Company. Here, on the river, were several huge dredgers which had in years gone by been used to dredge that portion of the proposed waterway from ocean to ocean. But since the company had failed the dredgers had been idle, and they were now fast falling to decay.

"Uncle Sam will have to dig a canal, that is all there is to it," declared Frank. "And he'll have to do it either here or at the Isthmus of Panama."

"Well, Uncle Sam will get at it just as soon as he can make up his mind which route is best," put in Sam. "You see," he added, "he's a namesake of mine and I know just what he is up to." And a laugh followed in which even Hockley joined.

So far matters had run smoothly between Hockley and the other boys. Occasionally one or another

would flare up, but the general good sense of the party kept down any regular outburst.

"But it can't last," said Darry to Frank, in confidence. "It isn't in Glummy to be friendly with us."

"Perhaps it isn't in us to be friendly with him, Darry. I am going to do my best to keep the hatchet buried."

"Oh, so will I!"

On the second and the third days in Greytown it rained, and the showers were so heavy that the boys had to remain indoors most of the time. This caused some grumbling, and Frank told the professor that he was for striking out to the westward at once "to get out of the wet," as he expressed it.

"We shall not stay here long," answered Professor Strong. "I calculated to strike out for the Lake next Monday morning. I thought perhaps you would first like to take a ride on muleback up into the Mosquito Territory, or the Department of Zelaya, as it is now called."

"Hurrah! Just the thing!" cried Darry, who was at hand. "I've been aching for a ride in the saddle."

"I don't know about a muleback ride," said Hockley doubtfully. "I haven't forgotten what happened to me while we were in Cuba."

At this Darry wanted to laugh outright, for he remembered how poor Hockley had been pitched head first into a cistern by the beast he was riding. But the fun-loving youth restrained himself.

"Better luck this time, Jake," he said. "Perhaps the mules are not so frisky as they were in Cuba."

"I think I had better caution you, Dartworth," came from the professor. "You are apt to ride like the Old Nick when you get into the saddle. Now be careful and keep out of trouble."

The next day it was clear, and having procured the best mules a native livery stable afforded, they set out toward the north, along a road leading to the Rio Grande and beyond.

They had heard that this section of Nicaragua is but little inhabited and soon proved the truth of the statement. Villages were wide apart and they were of the most primitive character, often consisting of nothing more than a dozen or a score of thatched huts. Only a small portion of the soil was cultivated, and they saw but little live stock outside of a

few cows, some pigs, and here and there a flock of chickens.

"This soil would produce good crops of many things," said the professor, as they rode along. "But the average Indian and negro is of a lazy nature and will not do more than is absolutely necessary. As for the better class of Nicaraguans, they will not settle in this section, but prefer the uplands and the mountains."

"Well, I can't say that I blame them," returned Mark. "Here things are worse than wet—they are soggy and seem to be full of fever."

As a precaution the professor had dosed them all with quinine, so that the tropical fever, so fatal to many in Central America, did not affect them. On and on they went, deeper and deeper into what proved a perfect wilderness of tropical beauty. On either side of the narrow cart road were palms, plantains, and wild orange trees, with bushes innumerable, and over all were huge vines, some trailing a distance of a hundred feet or more.

"My gracious, what's that!" cried Frank, presently. "He was in advance and reined up as something scampered across the trail."

"It was either a wild hog or a peccary," said

Professor Strong. "I hope he didn't scare you."

"If we were out on a hunt we could get him," declared Sam.

"Perhaps," replied the tutor. "But you must remember that the jungle of brush and vines is thick here and you would have your hands full following for any distance."

"Are there many wild animals here?" asked Frank.

"Yes, of the smaller kinds, but hardly anything large, outside of a few pumas and occasionally a deer. But the monkeys are without number, and so too the parrots, as you will soon learn."

Presently a distant creaking on the road ahead reached their ears, accompanied by the occasional crack of a whip, and soon after a native *carreta*, or cart, hove into sight, drawn by a lazy team of oxen. Each wheel of the cart was made of a solid piece of wood, and the whole affair was correspondingly clumsy. On the seat sat a dark-skinned native, leisurely puffing away at a black cigar. He stared at our friends curiously, but did not speak until the professor addressed him, when he was politely attentive.

"He says the road is pretty fair for the next two or three miles," said the professor. "After that it is not so good. He says we had better procure a guide at the village of Jurijabo." And then before they continued on their journey, he passed the native a small silver coin. The man was extremely grateful, and waved them a pleasant adieu with his broad-brimmed hat.

"What a lazy, self-satisfied life they lead!" remarked Frank, after the native had disappeared with his creaking cart.

"It is the weather that affects them," replied Professor Strong. "A great many foreigners when they first come to such a climate as this are very active, but in a few years they are apt to drop into the native way of living."

Since stopping at Trinidad, Sam had interested himself in botany, and he often stopped to pick specimens of flowers which he intended to press and send home to his mother, who loved such things.

"Oh, I haven't got time to stop for flowers," cried Darry, after half a dozen halts had been made. "I'm going to try my mule's speed. I'll wait for you a bit further on." And before the professor could

remonstrate he was moving onward as fast as the speed of the steed he rode would permit.

At first Frank thought of following, but just then Hockley called attention to some bright-colored parrots that had suddenly come into view. So far they had seen but few of these birds, and none at short range, and the sight interested them greatly.

"My mother has a parrot similar to that one," observed Hockley, pointing with his hand. "He's quite a cute beggar, too, and says thirty or forty words. We got him from a sailor who used to stop at Central American ports."

"Their plumage ought to be worth some money," put in Mark. "But I think it's a shame to slaughter so many birds just for the sake of trimming the ladies' hats."

So far the parrots had been silent, but suddenly they broke out into a wild, rasping squawk which was absolutely painful to the ears, and which caused more than one of the party to give a start of alarm. Then the birds flew away as quickly as they had come.

"I think we'll get some hunting in Nicaragua," said Frank, as they moved on once more, after Sam had picked half a dozen strange flowers, all

heavy with perfume. "We must go out, professor."

"I'll take you out some day," replied Professor Strong. "But from what I have learned, this is not the best section of Nicaragua to hunt in. Most of the wild animals keep in the mountains of the west."

"Come on and catch Darry!" cried Frank, and set off briskly.

But to catch the fun-loving lad was not so easy. As my old readers know, the boy from Chicago was used to the saddle and had often ridden for miles on the cattle ranges owned by his father. Nothing suited him better than to "tear along," as he expressed it, despite the fact that this same "tearing along" had gotten him into more than one difficulty.

Instead of getting worse, as the cart driver had said, the road appeared to grow better, at least for the next mile, and as Darry had taken care to pick out the best mule he could find he covered the ground in an astonishingly short space of time. He had now reached a section where there was considerable sand and where the roadway was wider. He too saw a great number of parrots and an equally large congregation of monkeys.

The monkeys appeared of all sorts and sizes, and

they chattered to such an extent that it made Darry's ears ring.

"You noise makers!" he exclaimed, shaking his fist at them in his high spirits. "I wish I had something to throw at you. I'd soon teach you—— Well, of all the nerve I ever saw!"

He reined up the mule as quickly as he could and glared up at a big monkey sitting on a branch close at hand. In passing he had ridden beneath the branch, and the big monkey had had the assurance to reach down and snatch his cap from his head.

"Hi! you come back with my cap!" roared Darry. But at this the monkey only grinned and bobbed his head. He tried the cap on, but as it did not fit he began gravely to tear it apart, throwing the top button into Darry's face.

"I'll get that cap back or know the reason why," said the youth to himself, and leaping to the ground made after the monkey, who had hopped to a bush to the left of the road. He had almost reached the animal when the monkey made another move, but only for a few feet.

Darry became so interested in the chase that he did not realize how deep he was getting into the bushes nor how far he was from the roadway. Pres-

ently the monkey came out on another trail and skipped swiftly across a sandy plain probably a hundred feet in diameter. Then he sat on a fallen log, grinning at Darry once more.

"I'll get you now, or give it up," muttered Darry to himself, and picking up a stick he hurled it at the animal, at the same time starting to run across the sandy opening.

He had hardly taken a score of steps before he realized that the sandy plain was not as solid as he had anticipated. He sank up to his ankles and then to his knees. In fresh alarm he tried to turn and go back. He could scarcely budge his feet, and in a few seconds more he was up to his waist.

The awful realization of his situation then burst upon him. He was in a quicksand. Whether or not the monkey had lured him there purposely he could not tell, but be that as it might, he felt that he was in great peril of his life.

CHAPTER XII

A NIGHT AMONG THE MOSQUITO INDIANS

"I MADE a mistake when I went after that monkey," said Darry to himself. "And there he is yet, grinning at me as wickedly as ever! Oh, if only I could get at you!" And he shook his fist at the simian.

But now was no time to think of the little rascal who had stolen his cap. He was sinking deeper and deeper into the quicksand. He was soon almost up to his arm-pits. He struggled wildly, but to budge was next to impossible. He found himself drawn down and down steadily. His alarm grew more serious than ever.

"I must get out somehow," was what he told himself, and then he listened intently. At a distance he heard hoof-beats on the road he had left but a short while before. The rest of the party were passing.

"Hullo!" he cried. "Help! help!"

Again and again he repeated the cry and listened

with bated breath for a reply. He heard Frank's merry laugh ring out and some kind of a shout from Sam. But there was no answer to his call for aid, and soon the party swept on out of hearing.

"They'll find my mule," he told himself. "That will make them hunt for me. But if I can't keep up so long——"

The conclusion of that thought made him shiver. Was it possible that he would sink from sight in that horrible quicksand, with nobody at hand to give him aid?

"If I go under they'll never even find my body," he muttered. "Oh, this is the worst yet. I must get out! I simply must!"

He repeated the words over and over again, and they appeared to give him some encouragement. Growing calmer he gazed more closely around him. He was at least twenty feet from solid ground. On one side were some straggling bushes and on the others a row of fairly tall and drooping trees. Looking up he saw that one of the trees had a branch which came to within ten feet of his head.

"If I could only get up and reach that," he told himself. "But I can't jump up any more than I can

fly, and I am going down deeper and deeper. I might——”

Darry stopped short. He remembered that he had a fish-line in his jacket pocket, for he had thought to try his hand at fishing while on the trip to the Rio Grande. It might be possible for him to throw one end of the fish-line over the tree limb and draw himself out in that fashion.

With difficulty he drew the line out. It was long and strong, and before making his cast he doubled it, so that it would be of four-fold strength when the outer end came down over the limb—if he could make the throw.

Darry was used to casting, and the line went just where he wanted it, inside of a fork, which would keep it from slipping off the outer end of the branch. He had some difficulty in gathering in the flying ends, but at last he had them and soon they were twisted into quite a respectable-sized cord.

Now came the tug of war, and Darry took a long breath before trying to pull himself up. The sand clung tightly to him as if loath to let him go. By this time the monkey had disappeared, leaving the cap lying on the log.

Using every ounce of his strength, Darry hauled

with might and main, the perspiration pouring from his body, for the sand was hot and had already more than warmed him up. Slowly he came up, inch by inch.

"I'm going to make it!" he muttered, when he was cleared as far as his waist. "A couple of pulls more and I shall be all right."

Again he hauled and a few inches more of freedom were placed to his credit. His muscles ached and the veins stood out boldly on his dripping forehead.

"This a tug of war with a vengeance!" he muttered. "If I ever get out of this you'll not catch me in another quicksand in a hurry! It's worse than a sticking plaster!"

The next haul brought forth an ominous sound from the tree. It was a snap, followed by a crack that caused Darry's heart to sink in his bosom.

"The limb is breaking off," he thought. "If it goes down—— Oh!"

Another crack had followed, and down came the tree branch, hurling the youth flat on his back. He scrambled over in a hurry and fell sprawling on the branch, which immediately began to sink from sight, carrying him down with it.

He was now but little better off than when he had started to save himself. The branch afforded him some slight footing, so he did not sink so fast as formerly. But, on the other hand, he was completely winded and could do little but pant for breath.

Slowly a half-hour went by. Darry had tried in a dozen ways to clear himself of the treacherous sand and had failed. The sky had become overcast and it was beginning to rain. The youth was thoroughly miserable.

"What can the others be doing?" he mused. "Surely they won't desert me. They'll come back as soon as they find that mule. But perhaps the mule kept right on to the next village."

The rain gave him a little relief, for it wet his burning head and flushed face. He turned up his mouth and let the cooling drops fall on his tongue.

Hark! What was that? Another quarter of an hour had gone by and Darry was in a sort of stupor, when a crackling of brushwood reached his ears. He listened intently, and then set up a shout. Soon footsteps could be heard.

"They are coming!" he thought. "Wonder who it is in the lead?" And he set up another shout.

A moment later a form came into view. It was

that of an Indian youth of Darry's age. The new-comer, who was but scantily clad, and who carried a bow and some arrows, stared at Darry in amazement.

"Help me out of this, please!" gasped Darry. "And hurry up. I am getting in deeper and deeper."

The Indian boy continued to stare for a moment more. Then, without saying a word, he dropped his bow and arrows and came around to where the tree was located. Up this he went like a cat until he was about fifteen feet from the ground. Then he uncoiled a grass rope that had been slung over his shoulder and threw one end to Darry.

"White boy hol' fast, Indian boy pull quick," he said, in broken English.

"All right, I hold fast enough," answered Darry. "But you look out that you don't pitch in yourself."

Then came another tug of war. But the Indian lad evidently knew what he was doing. He pulled in just the proper direction, and with quick jerks, and Darry came up before he realized it. Then the Indian boy swung him to solid ground, laughing heartily to himself as he did so.

"Golizo land white boy like um land big fish," he

said. "White boy keep from dat sand after dis. Bad spot him—kill mules an' once kill boy like Golizo."

"I believe you," panted Darry. "It—it almost killed me. I—I—— What in the world is the matter with my head? It's going round like a top."

And then, as the Indian youth leaped from the tree, Darry pitched forward on a hillock of grass and lay there like a log.

Golizo was a Mosquito Indian, although he had a trace of negro blood in his veins. He belonged at an Indian village less than a mile away, on a seldom-traveled trail bordering a shallow creek. He had been out hunting birds for their feathers, and had a grass bag at his side partly filled with game. These feathers he could trade at Greytown and other towns for such commodities as he and his parents needed in their primitive life.

Golizo was evidently taken with Darry's appearance, for he handled the fun-loving youth with care, turning him over and rubbing his hands and wrists. He would have procured water from a nearby hollow, only Darry was already drenched from the rain, which was now coming down harder than ever.

Presently, seeing that Darry still remained uncon-

scious, he placed the boy's cap in his pocket and took the inanimate form up in his arms and then over his shoulder. Thus burdened, and with his bow and arrows secured, he set off through the forest, in the direction of his home.

When Darry came to his senses he found himself lying on some soft boughs in the single room of a low, thatched hut. The hut was in semi-darkness and the rain pattered loudly on the roof.

Close at hand several Indians were moving about, and presently he made out the lad who had rescued him, as he came forward, holding a cocoanut shell in his hand, filled with something to drink.

"So the white boy is better," said the Indian youth, with something approaching a smile. "Golizo glad to see that. Better drink dis, make um strong."

"What is it?" asked Darry faintly.

"Him made of berries—werry good for sick boy. No will hurt you to drink."

The shell was held to Darry's lips and he took a sip of the liquid. It was sweet and pleasing, and he drank half of what was there. The concoction appeared to clear his head wonderfully, and before long he felt almost as well as ever.

Golizo's stock of English was limited, and he spoke with an accent which at one time reminded Darry of Spanish and at another of the negroes. His face showed his friendliness, and Darry was glad that he had fallen into such good hands.

The day was coming to an end and presently the Indian lit a small lamp, filled with some foul-smelling oil. They were cooking supper at a fire built under a shelter to the doorway of the hut. Occasionally a gust of wind would blow the smoke into the hut, but the natives seemed to be used to this. The fire rested on a hard, clayey floor and was surrounded by several stones. Over these a kettle was boiling, while in the hot ashes some yams and some *tortillas* were being prepared for consumption.

As well as he could, Darry explained the situation to Golizo and asked if the Indians could carry word to his friends.

"Golizo go myself, as soon as we have um eatin'," was the answer.

Golizo's father proved to be an elderly Indian, tall and straight, with large brass rings in his ears. The Indian youth's mother was a fat and greasy-looking squaw, with a flat nose and lips which plainly showed some negro blood. There were several other

Indians about the place, including two little children who amused themselves for the greater part by stuffing grass into each other's mouths. Darry gave each of the children a bright cent, which they regarded with much pride. But soon the old squaw took the money away and put it in a beaded purse attached to a belt around her waist. Then she came and held out her own hand, but before Darry could give her anything Golizo's father appeared on the scene and shoved her away for thus soliciting pay from their guest. A few hot words followed, but as they were spoken in the Indian tongue Darry did not understand what was said. But after that the squaw left him severely alone.

Immediately after eating, Golizo set out on his mission, leaving Darry on the couch in the hut. The place reeked with bad odors, and before long Darry became well acquainted with a large number of fleas belonging to the redmen and their skulking dogs, of which half a dozen howled around that hut and some others in the vicinity. The youth stood it as long as he could, and then jumped up and began to scratch himself furiously.

At this the head of the house motioned to the boy and led the way to another hut only a few

steps away. Here was a fresh bed of boughs just brought in. The place was clean and sweet, and Darry smiled to show he appreciated it, for Golizo's father could not understand English. Then the boy sank down to rest, and before long was in the land of dreams.

CHAPTER XIII

ALONG THE NICARAGUA CANAL

WHEN Darry awoke the storm of the day before had cleared away and the sun was shining brightly. From outside a little smoke drifted in, along with the smell of broiling fish. Leaping up, he found himself a bit stiff, but otherwise as well as when he had started on his muleback ride.

"That was certainly an adventure," he told himself. "And I am not yet entirely out of it. I hope Golizo has found the professor and the others." And he walked outside.

"Hullo! you're a nice one to run away from us," cried a familiar voice, and he saw the professor taking it easy by the next hut, while Frank was also present.

"Oh!" ejaculated Darry, and his face showed his relief. "I didn't know you were here."

"We came in last night. The Indian boy brought us over from another village. We found you sound asleep, so we didn't disturb you."

"You got yourself in a nice hole," put in Frank. "The Indian boy has been telling us as well as he is able. What made you leave the mule and go into the woods?"

"A monkey," answered Darry gravely. "Nothing but a chattering, idiotic monkey. And I was just as much of an idiot to follow him," he added.

And then he told his story in detail, finishing by exhibiting the cap Golizo had turned over to him. "I am going to keep the cap as a relic," he continued. "I wish I had the monkey—I'd turn him over to some circus, so they could put him behind bars, where he couldn't do any more damage."

"In the future you must beware of where you walk or ride," said Professor Strong. "Low ground like this is apt to be full of swamp holes, or sinks, as they call them out West, in the United States, and quicksands. You can be thankful to the Indian boy for rescuing you."

"Yes, and I am going to reward him, too," said Darry. "I am going to give him a five-dollar gold

piece I've been carrying since we left Havana. I reckon that is more than he has ever had in his life."

And later on the gold was turned over to Golizo, who received it with keen delight.

"Um *Americano* boy fine fella," he cried. "Um heap bully boy, as um call it. Golizo like to work fo' dat kind," and his eyes glistened.

Quite a fair breakfast of fish and *tortillas* was served by the Indians, and then Golizo was engaged to take them all back to where the professor had left Mark, Sam, and Hockley. Before leaving the Indian village the professor rewarded those who had taken care of his missing protégé.

The mule Darry had been riding had been found and brought along, so that they all rode, while Golizo trotted ahead on foot, running as lightly and easily as a deer.

"He's a fine fellow, even if he is an Indian," said Darry in a low voice. "But oh, what a mother he has got!" And he uttered a low whistle of disgust.

"The father is all right," answered Professor Strong. "You must remember that, as a general thing, Indians regard their squaws as little better than cattle. Many of them, especially down here, would willingly trade a squaw for a good horse. It

will take many years to teach the red men true civilization."

The heavy rain had put a damper on the trip northward, and when the others of the party were joined it was decided to return to Greytown without visiting the Rio Grande.

"We will get farther westward, out of this fever-laden district," said the tutor.

Golizo insisted upon accompanying them to Greytown, stating he wished to visit the place on business. But once in the town, he begged that he might remain with them, at least until Lake Nicaragua was reached.

"I do plenty work," he said. "Golizo no afraid of dat work, no. You pay me very little, I go; yes."

"Why not let him go?" said Darry. "You can take the money out of my allowance. He may prove useful to us." And so it was decided.

When Golizo was informed that he could go along he danced a regular war dance, and let out half a dozen wild whoops, much to the boys' amusement.

While at the hotel in Greytown Professor Strong was visited by Manuel Nonti, who came to introduce his cousin, Ramon Malaya. The latter, a heavy-set,

swarthy Spaniard, was a river boatman, owning several craft that plied the waters of the San Juan and of Lake Nicaragua.

"I t'ink maybe you wanta my cousin's boat," said Nonti, gazing at the professor with his calculating black eyes. "He gotta da good boat on da river."

"Yes, verra good boat—dree good boat," put in Ramon Malaya. "Giva de good ride on da river for da cheapa price, señor."

"We are not going to take a boat from Greytown," said Professor Strong, who was not favorably impressed with the appearance of the Spanish boatman. "We are going to travel overland to Ochoa, to look at what has been done on the proposed canal, and we may not take a boat until we reach the San Carlos River, four miles beyond."

"I hava da boat at Ochoa for you, señor," persisted Ramon Malaya. "Good boat, too. You take him, yes?"

"Well, I'll see about it," returned the professor briefly. He did not wish to refuse the fellow point-blank, since he had been introduced by one who had recently been his fellow-passenger on a trip across the Caribbean Sea.

All the party, including Golizo, left Greytown on muleback, with extra animals to carry such things as they deemed necessary for the trip. Their trunks had been forwarded by the river and lake to Granada. Manuel Nonti saw them depart, and his face grew dark when he found that the Indian lad formed one of the party.

"You go with them?" he asked in the Indian dialect, for he had passed some years in the Mosquito Reservation.

"I shall go some distance," answered Golizo briefly.

"Not all the way, then?"

"I am afraid not."

"That is good," muttered Manuel Nonti to himself, as he turned away. "Cousin Ramon will catch them yet,—the fat birds,—and I shall demand my share of the pickings." And he rubbed his hands together in satisfaction.

As the party rode along the route of the proposed canal, looking at what little work had already been accomplished, the professor, who had studied up on the subject, gave them a little talk on the matter.

"This idea of piercing Central America with a canal is by no means new," he said. "As soon as it

was definitely known that there was no way of reaching the Pacific but by sailing around Cape Horn, the nations of the Old World laid plans for canals. The first surveying was done by the Spaniards, although it amounted to but little. They were followed, some years later, by the French, and then by a commission appointed by the President of Mexico. But Spain, France, and Mexico were so wrapped up in wars and revolutions that they had no time to think of canals, and no real work was done until the United States took hold, in 1826, 1837, 1872, and 1885. Some Americans got the right from the Nicaraguan Government to cut a canal in 1848, during the California gold fever, and when times were brisk down here, but nothing came of that."

"And when was the present company organized?" asked Mark, who wanted to know all about the canal.

"A company was organized in 1887, with a charter from Nicaragua. Two years later this company transferred its rights to the Maritime Canal Company, holding a charter from our government. This company spent a great deal of money in dredging, building dams, constructing temporary railroads, and the like; but more money was needed than was

at first supposed, and the company, as I told you before, went into the hands of a receiver. At present, as you see, everything is at a standstill."

"But we'll have a canal sooner or later," put in Sam.

"The length of the canal, from Greytown to Brito, on the Pacific, was to be 170 miles. The larger part of the way being through the San Juan River and Lake Nicaragua, it was calculated that the real excavations would not exceed twenty-five to thirty miles. As I told you before, the level of the lake is 110 feet above that of the ocean, and to reach the lake, the canal on each side was to be provided with three locks. There was also to be a big dam at Ochoa, the place for which we are bound, and an artificial harbor for ships at the Pacific end of the canal. The cost was to run into many millions of dollars, and has already reached the millions."

"It's a gigantic undertaking," said Frank; "too much for a private corporation."

They had now come to a crossing of one of the streams. There was no bridge, and they sent Golizo forward to make certain that the ford was safe.

"Look! look!" cried Hockley, who had been si-

lent for a long while. "There's a shot for somebody!"

He pointed into the bushes, where a dark animal of some kind could be seen moving slowly along.

"It looks like an alligator!" cried Sam.

"I'll take a shot for luck," said Mark, with an inquiring look at the professor.

Professor Strong nodded, and the next instant Mark's rifle, which he had been carrying on his back, rang out. The report was followed by a wild thrashing in the brushwood.

"You've struck it, whatever it is," cried Darry.

And then they moved forward in a body, to learn what their first hunting in Nicaragua had brought down.

CHAPTER XIV

HUNTING AND FISHING

It was somewhat dark in the tall grass, and they advanced with caution, so that the game might not attack them if it was not mortally wounded.

"Be careful," came from Hockley, who kept somewhat to the rear. "It may be a wildcat, and I've heard they are awfully hard to kill."

"Wildcats don't have such tails as that," returned Frank. "It looked like an alligator."

"If it was an animal and had an alligator tail, I think I can tell you what it was," came from the professor, with a smile.

"What?" questioned all the boys.

"A lizard!" shouted Frank and Darry.

"Who ever heard of such a lizard?" declared the fun-loving youth. "Why, lizards are small."

“Not the kind that grow down here and in South America. Some of these lizards are three and four feet long, and I have heard of them growing to a length of five feet and a half, although I never saw one of that size.”

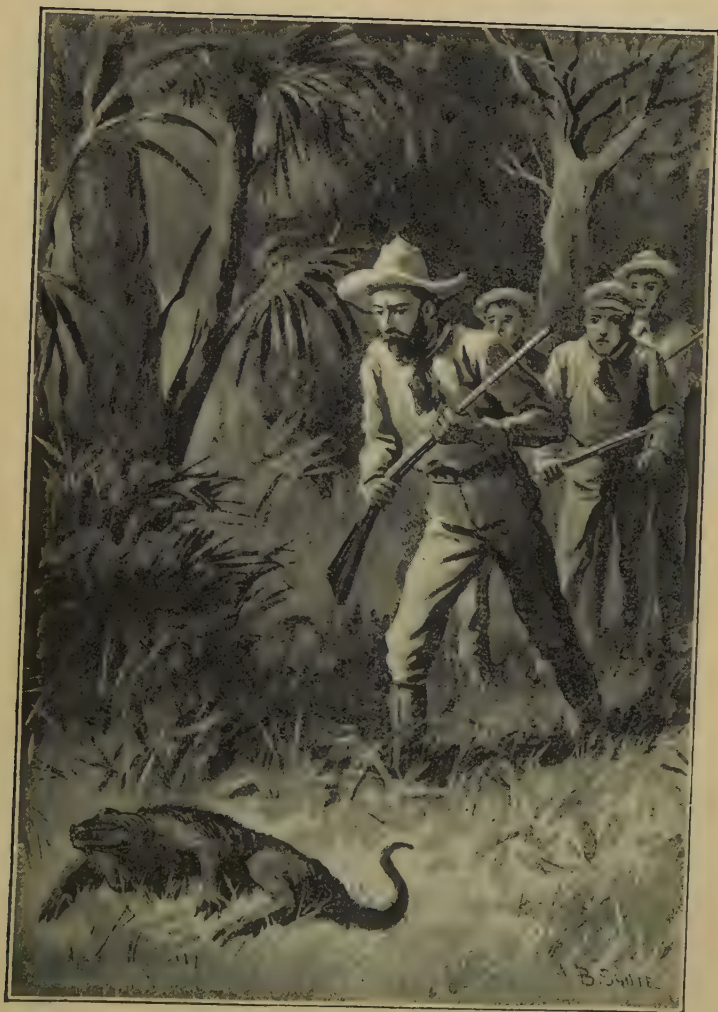
“Well, I declare!” burst out Mark, somewhat in disgust. “And did I shoot a lizard? If I did, there is no use of our hunting for the thing.”

“Oh, yes, there is. We want to make sure, you know. It might—— There it is, and quite dead, too.”

The professor stepped forward into something of a hollow, and picked up the game, which, including the tail, measured probably three feet and a half. It was a curious-looking creature, with a serrated back and a long, tapering tail, and queer, broad mouth, with puffed-out throat.

“Why, I think I know what this is,” shouted Sam. “It is an iguana. I saw one once in a menagerie.”

“You are right, Samuel. The iguanas belong to the lizard family, and there are many varieties, found not only in Central and South Americas, but also in Mexico and the West Indies. We have already seen some of these in Venezuela, but nothing like this.”



It was a curious-looking creature. — *Page 128.*

"And you say that thing is good to eat?" questioned Hockley.

"Yes, Jacob; iguana meat is highly prized by the natives, and many prefer it to spring chicken, which it resembles in flavor. They boil and roast it, and I once had some iguana cutlets which were as sweet as the finest pork I ever tasted."

By this time Golizo was returning to learn what the shot meant. When he saw the game he grinned broadly.

"Um good eating," he said. "Golizo catch many dem. Catch wid a stick and a net, so," and he made a motion as if casting. "Sometime shake um from tree, and catch by tail quick."

The Indian boy was for looking around for more of the iguanas, declaring they generally traveled in pairs, and sometimes with their young. But though they looked, no more of the lizards were sighted. The game was packed on the back of one of the mules, and they moved forward as before.

As they advanced they found the jungle thicker than ever. In some places the stately trees were so intertwined with the tough, trailing vines that they had literally to cut their way through. Often the ground was swampy, and had it not been for the

Indian youth they might have gone hopelessly astray.

"Had I imagined it was as bad as this, I should have come westward by way of the river," said Professor Strong. "But I was assured at Greytown that this road was in fairly good condition."

"Um good last season," said Golizo. "But heap plenty rain come, wash and wash; den all mud run," and he nodded gravely.

Here and there they came upon what had once been a station of the canal company. These spots were now deserted, and the little work accomplished on the canal route was fast falling into a state of decay.

"If Uncle Sam takes hold here, he'll have to start at the beginning," was Frank's comment.

Toward the middle of the afternoon they reached higher ground, where the walking and riding became safer. At this point monkeys and birds were numerous, and the wild cries and incessant chatter could be heard a long distance off.

"I hope we don't have to go into camp with such a noise as that over us," said Sam. "I couldn't sleep a wink."

By sunset they reached a small settlement known

as Golmoda, which was merely a lumber camp, from which quantities of cabinet woods were shipped down a small stream to the San Juan, and thus to Greytown. Most of the sawing was done by hand.

"Humph! How this would make my father laugh," said Hockley, as he watched the slow work in disgust. "Why, one of his Pennsylvania saw-mills would cut up ten times as much lumber in two hours as they can cut up here in a day."

"Perhaps it would pay your father to open up down here," said Mark. "The woods are valuable; and he could put you in charge."

"What! Do you think I'd stay in such a fever-stricken country as this? Not much! If I ever go in the lumber business, it will be out West, on the Columbia, or somewhere in that section."

Nevertheless, Hockley made a careful survey of the situation, and asked innumerable questions of one of the foremen, who happened to understand English. He put the information in a letter to his parent, along with a photograph Mark took, and that epistle proved to be one of the most interesting he had sent home since starting out on the tour.

Our friends stopped at Golmoda all night, and at eight o'clock the following morning struck out for

Ochoa. They were now in something of a hilly territory, and near to a tributary of the San Juan.

"Phew! but it's hot!" declared Darry, as he wiped the perspiration from his face. "I feel as if I was suffocating."

"We'll take it easy between eleven and two o'clock," said Professor Strong; and this was done, the boys resting beneath the shade of several indigo trees. Just before coming to a rest they had sighted half a dozen peccaries, and Frank and Sam had each laid one low. Hockley had also seen a small deer, but the animal had disappeared before he could draw aim upon it.

Golizo helped to cook the meal, and it proved decidedly tempting, in spite of the heat. The night before they had eaten of the iguana, and found it exceedingly sweet, and the peccaries, made into a stew, were also eaten with a relish. The Indian boy made for them some corn cakes which, as Darry put it, melted in their mouths without butter.

Two days later found them at Ochoa. Much to their disappointment, the town proved small and of no interest. A dam for the river had here been begun by the canal company, but the work amounted to next to nothing.

"I move we push on to Lake Nicaragua," said Darry. And the others agreed unanimously.

While they were meditating on whether to go by muleback or boat to the San Carlos River, a familiar form approached them. The newcomer proved to be Ramon Malaya.

"Ah, señor! You taka da boat now, eh?" cried the Spanish boatman, as he bowed profoundly to the professor. "I have da fine boat here to go to da lake."

Professor Strong was surprised at the appearance of the boatman.

"You must have come through quickly," he said.

Ramon Malaya shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I haf four good men for da boat," he answered. "We row queek, señor. You try him an' see, señor." And he bowed again.

As there was no harm in inspecting the Spaniard's craft, they all walked down to the river. They found the boat of Spanish design, but narrow, and evidently built for speed. There were a mainsail and a jib, and also seats for four oarsmen. In the stern was a hood, where two or three persons might crouch in case of rain.

The matter was talked over, and at last Professor

Strong, somewhat against his will, agreed to engage Ramon Malaya to take them from Ochoa to Fort San Carlos, on the lake shore. Arrangements were made to send the mules back to Greytown, and before nightfall the young explorers found themselves landed at Boca San Carlos.

"I must say I don't like this Ramon Malaya at all," said Mark to Frank, when they were out of hearing of the boat owner and his men.

"I feel the same about it, Mark. But he is very polite."

"His politeness isn't genuine."

"Well, we can easily make him keep his distance."

The San Juan River at this point was broad and shallow, and further on were numerous rapids. During the evening the boys tried their hands at fishing, and brought in not a few specimens of the finny tribe, as well as several large crabs, such as make their home in the sandy soil of this water-course.

"Animal life is plentiful here," observed Sam, as he counted his fish.

"Yes, I found that out last night," laughed Darry.

"I felt fleas, gnats, mosquitoes, and some things for

which I can't find a name, even though I felt their sting." And at this a laugh went up, for all had suffered from the insects the fun-loving boy had mentioned.

Roughly speaking, it is fifteen miles from the San Carlos River to Castillo, and twenty miles from the latter town to the eastern shore of Lake Nicaragua. But by the San Juan the route is much longer, for the stream twists and winds in serpentine fashion, between great stretches of dense jungle that hardly know the footsteps of man. At Castillo there are some heavy rapids, and Ramon Malaya said he and his men would have to carry their boat around by the portage path.

It had begun to rain once more, and all hands were glad when the Spanish boatman announced that they were in sight of Castillo. It proved to be a small, huddled-up town at the foot of a hill. There was a fort, and one long and exceedingly dirty street. The town was crowded with people, and accommodations for the travelers were out of the question.

"We'll go across the river, and camp out," said the professor, and this was done. Ramon Malaya and his men took them to where they wished to go, but seemed disappointed because they would not put

up at a wretched hut the boat owner had recommended.

While they were making themselves comfortable for the night, Mark happened to put his hand in one of his pockets, in which he usually carried some cash.

"Hullo! I've lost my money!" he cried.

"How much?" questioned Sam.

"About ten or fifteen dollars. Nearly all the professor gave me when we left Greytown."

"And I've lost my money, too!" came from Darry. "All gone but one silver piece. What can it mean?"

"Perhaps we have been robbed."

The boys looked around, but nothing could be found of the money. They reported the matter to the professor without delay.

CHAPTER XV

ON THE WATERS OF LAKE NICARAGUA

As soon as Professor Strong learned what the boys had to tell him, a prolonged search was made for the missing money, both in the camp and on board of the *Lola*, as Ramon Malaya's craft was called.

The Spaniard and his men declared over and over again that they had seen nothing of the cash, and were even willing to be searched; but no search was made of their persons, for Professor Strong felt that if they had taken the money, they had undoubtedly concealed it long before this.

"Well, I can't understand it," mused Mark. "Money can't walk off; and I haven't any hole in my pocket."

"Yes, you have," put in Darry, with a wink at Sam.

"I tell you I haven't," persisted Mark.

"If you haven't, how do you get your hand in?"

And then Darry dodged out of sight. Even the loss of his funds could not stop the flow of humor in him.

Despite the loss, all slept soundly that night. They awoke to find the parrots making the jungle behind them hideous with their cawing and crying.

"I should think such a noise would drive a nervous person crazy," said Sam.

"Have you met any nervous persons here?" questioned the professor.

"Hardly. Everybody seems contented and lazy, especially the latter."

The *Lola* had been taken above the Castillo Rapids, and soon they were on board once more, and bound for Fort San Carlos. The scenery was identical with that already passed, but the air was purer than that encountered in the lowlands.

Ramon Malaya and his men had but little to say. The loss of the money was not referred to again. The boys were glad to think the amounts had not been larger, and before long the matter was almost forgotten.

While they were on the river a small steamboat glided by, carrying a handful of passengers.

"I understand she plies regularly between Castillo and the lake," said the professor.

"Dat boat no good," put in Malaya, with a sour look. "Try to taka work away from our boats. Some day she blow up, señor, den killa da passengers."

"There's professional jealousy for you," laughed Frank. "He believes the river trade should be given to the boatmen, and nobody else."

"I guess he'd just love to blow up the steamboat," whispered Sam. "He looks bad enough to do it."

Ramon Malaya told them that he expected his cousin, Manuel Nonti, to join him at Fort San Carlos. The cousins owned a large boat plying on Lake Nicaragua, and Malaya was very anxious that Professor Strong hire the craft to take him and the boys to Granada.

"I will see about it," answered the professor. "I was thinking of taking one of the regular steamers."

"My boat is de much more comfortable, señor," pleaded Malaya. "An' we taka you dair verra cheap, too. You giva me da work lika da good man, señor."

But the professor would not promise. He was

becoming more and more distrustful, although he could not explain why.

The stream was beginning to grow broader, and toward the middle of the afternoon they came in sight of Lake Nicaragua, at a point where the lake is somewhat shallow. Soon they rounded a bend, and the Spanish boatman pointed out the two forts which give to the settlement of San Carlos its name.

As the boys had expected, the town proved of small importance. The forts were old and dilapidated, and the cannon hardly fit to be loaded. But there was a rather pretty church, at which some strange native ceremony was taking place. Later on there was a procession through the streets, led by some priests, who were followed by natives, carrying various church emblems and banners.

"This is something out of the ordinary," said Frank, as they watched the procession.

"They have a great many church holidays and holy days here," said Professor Strong. "I have been told that if all the days were to be counted, they would number over eighty in a year. The clergy have a great hold on people of all classes."

Like Greytown, Fort San Carlos had experienced a boom while work was being done on the canal, but

the boom was a thing of the past, and the town was all but asleep. The only diversion was to watch the arrival and departure of the boats on the river and the lake, and in this there was a good deal of sameness.

Since journeying on the river with Ramon Malaya, Golizo had had but little to say. The Indian boy was fearful that the others might accuse him of having taken the missing money, and begged, over and over again, that they search him and his few belongings.

"You're all right, Golizo," said Darry. "I'll stake my word you had nothing to do with it."

Like the others, Golizo mistrusted Malaya and his men, and when the Spaniards went off to a low drinking resort in the town, the Indian youth followed them. It was dark, and, by watching his chances, he managed to keep close to the Spaniards without being discovered.

The next morning he called early at the hotel, and asked for Darry before the latter was dressed.

"What is it now, Golizo?" questioned Darry, on coming to meet the Indian youth.

"Golizo learn somefing," was the low answer. "Folly Malaya las' night; no good him, no."

" You followed Ramon Malaya ? "

The Indian youth nodded. Then, in his own fashion, he related his story, of how the Spaniard and his boatmen had drunk deeply of several kinds of liquor, and then become loose of tongue. He had not understood all that had been spoken, but had learned enough to convince him that Ramon Malaya and his followers were little better than river and lake pirates, working, however, on a small scale. He had heard them mention the missing money, and laugh in a suggestive fashion, and had heard Malaya say that they would make good work of it when they got the Yankees out on the lake.

" So that is their game," said Darry, his merry eyes growing stern. " I must tell the professor of this."

" Yes, yes; tell da boss," said Golizo. " But no tell Malaya dat I say um, no. If tell, Malaya, he kill Indian boy, suah."

" I'll see that you are protected," was Darry's assurance.

He immediately called Amos Strong aside, and explained the situation. Then Golizo was cross-questioned, but it was found that he could give little additional information.

"There is little to do—I mean so far as recovering the missing money is concerned," said the professor. "But after this I'll make Ramon Malaya and his men keep their distance."

"Will you take the regular steamer to Granada?" questioned Darry.

"Oh, don't do that!" came from Frank, who had joined them. He had set his heart on a little cruise in a sailboat among the numerous islands of the lake.

"We'll decide that point some time to-day," answered Professor Strong.

When Ramon Malaya was told that he would not be engaged for the trip up the lake, his face grew dark and full of resentment. He wanted to know why, and insisted that he was entitled to the job, considering that he had brought them thus far.

"Never mind; I do not want you, and that is the end of it," said Amos Strong, and would listen to no more. Later on he was visited by Manuel Nonti, who wanted to show him the elegant boat Malaya and himself owned, but Amos Strong declined to look the craft over.

"They are as mad as hornets," said Mark, after Nonti had departed. "We'll have to keep our weather-eye open for them."

Golizo knew a number of Indians who lived on the lake shore just above Fort San Carlos, and among these he found one who owned a boat which had been given to him years before by somebody connected with the canal. The craft was a sloop, of American rig, and the moment the boys saw the *Polly*, as she was called, they fell in love with her.

"That's the boat to take us up the lake," said Frank. "I know we can have a fine sail on her."

A bargain was easily struck with Rainy Day, the Indian who owned the craft, and that night the *Polly* was loaded up with provisions for the trip, which was expected to last two or three days. Rainy Day was to go along and act as pilot, and Golizo was to keep with them until Granada was reached, when he was to return to Fort San Carlos on the boat.

The start was made early in the morning, for Rainy Day told them it would be very uncomfortable sailing during the middle of the day, when the fierce sun was directly overhead.

"All right; we'll take it easy on one of the islands during the high-sun hours," said Mark.

There was a good breeze from the eastward, and the run up the lake promised to be a fine one. Soon the hills of Fort San Carlos were left behind, and

they were standing almost straight for the Solentine Islands, a small and low group only a few miles away.

All were in the best of spirits, and as the boat cut the clear waters of the lake Sam could not help bursting out into a rowing song, in which the others joined. Even Hockley felt jolly, and amused himself in leaning over the side and trailing his fingers in the tiny waves.

"I wouldn't do that, Jacob," cautioned the professor.

"Oh! it won't hurt me," grumbled the lank youth.

"Yes, but——"

Amos Strong got no further. For just then a dark fin loomed up out of the water, and a large shark appeared, rushing swiftly to seize Hockley by the arm!

CHAPTER XVI

AN ADVENTURE ON OMETEPE ISLAND

“LOOK out!”

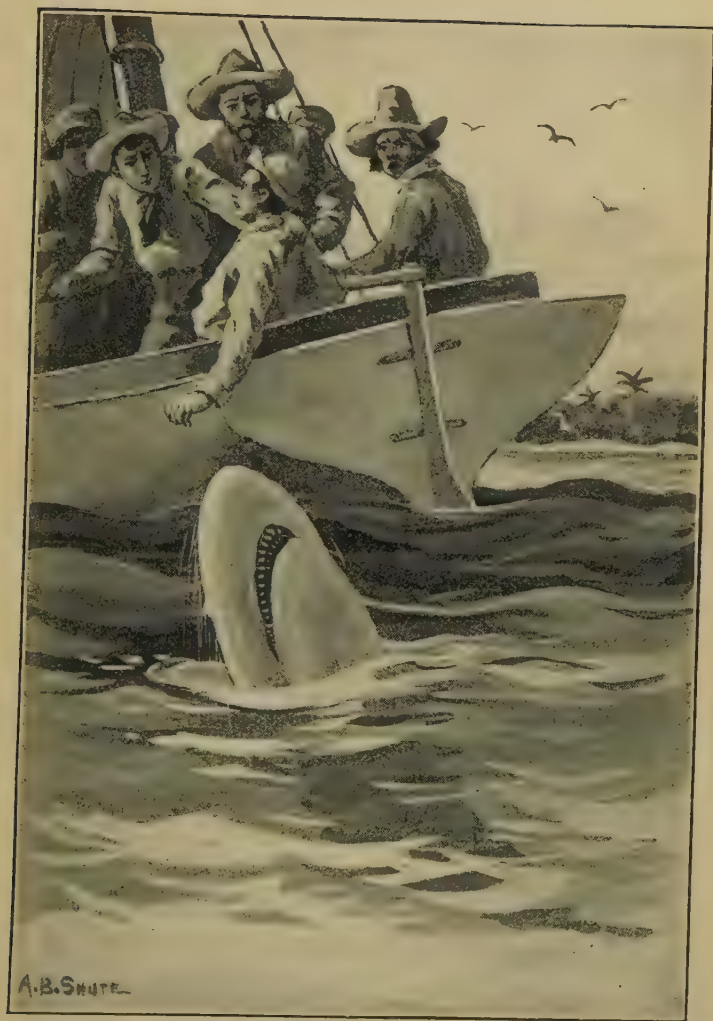
The single cry came from Mark, who saw the shark the instant the monster appeared and rushed for Hockley.

The lank youth did not understand the warning, and turned his face from the water, thinking something was wrong on the boat.

The fingers were still trailing in the waves, when Mark caught Hockley by the shoulder and gave him a jerk that sent him flying backward to the deck of the *Polly*. Up came the shark, but it was too late, and the disappointed monster disappeared as swiftly as it had come.

“Hi! What do you mean by yanking me like that?” roared the tall youth, in sudden rage. “I want you to understand——”

Then he stopped short, and looked at the professor, whose face had suddenly grown pale. Now Amos Strong breathed a sigh of relief.



Up came the shark, but it was too late. — *Page 146.*

"Well done, Mark; well done!" he ejaculated. "And not a moment too soon, either!"

"Wha—what's it all about?" stammered Hockley. "Why did he yank me backward?"

"Didn't you see the shark?" questioned Sam and Frank in a breath.

"The shark! Where?"

"Right there, in the water. It came up to snap off your hand, when Mark pulled you back."

"It—came—up—to—bite—me?" said Hockley slowly. He was so bewildered he could scarcely speak.

"Yes, Jacob; and had it not been for Mark, you would surely have lost your fingers, at the very least. I started to warn you before that shark appeared, for I had noticed another on the other side of the boat. After this, be careful how you put your hands into the water."

"I—I will, sir," stammered the tall youth. He had grown very pale, and now began to tremble. "If I had known the sharks were as bold as that I wouldn't have come on a sailboat."

"I was thinking of taking a swim when we stopped at one of the islands," put in Darry. "But I guess I'll change my mind."

"The sharks won't come in shallow water; so you can bathe where the water isn't deep, Dartworth," said Amos Strong.

Long before noon the Solentiname Islands were left behind, and they headed for Ometepe, the largest island of the lake.

"There are two volcanoes on Ometepe Island, but neither of them now active," said the professor. "The one nearest to us is Madera, which is not quite a mile high. That further to the northwest is Ometepe, 5750 feet high. It occasionally discharges sulphurous gases, but has not been in eruption since 1883."

"I should think the volcanoes might hurt any canal that was put through," came from Sam.

"Yes, a strong eruption might work untold harm. And an earthquake might prove just as bad."

"Do they have many earthquakes?" questioned Frank.

"We had an earthquake the other night, but all of you failed to wake up."

"Well, I never!" declared Darry. "How long did it last?"

"Only a few seconds. It was about like the jar of a heavy express train passing. The people down

here are used to them. Of course, a big earthquake would be quite a different thing."

"Well, at the next quake, please wake me up," said Darry. "I don't want to be rocked to sleep in such a manner," and this made the most of them laugh.

The breeze seemed to be in their favor, and, bound to make the most of it, they kept to their course until Ometepe Island was reached. Rainy Day knew of a good landing-place, and soon the *Polly* was beached on a narrow stretch of sand, backed up by tall trees and innumerable tropical bushes.

"We can have a jolly camp here!" cried Frank. "Let's build a campfire, and live out until dark, in true hunter's style."

"You won't want a campfire to keep you warm, I hope," came from Hockley. He was still nervous over the shark scare.

"Oh, no; only for looks, and to cook a meal by," answered Frank gayly.

They found a pleasant grove some distance from the shore, and here started a fire and proceeded to make themselves comfortable. On the way some fish had been caught, and these were broiled, which, with some fried plantains, *tortillas*, crackers, cof-

fee, and alligator pears, gave them all they wished to eat.

Something was said about exploring the adjacent mountains, but Rainy Day told them that the trail was a rough one, full of cacti and sword palms, and they concluded the task would be too hot and exhausting.

While they were eating, they saw two other sailboats pass, and also a tiny steamer. One sailboat came quite close to shore, but soon disappeared around a nearby headland.

"Golizo tells me there is the ruin of an ancient church not far from here," said Darry. "I'd like to see that."

"Yes, I have heard of that church. It dates back to the earliest Spanish times," put in the professor. "We may be able to pick up some valuable curiosities there."

The latter statement interested even Hockley, and soon the whole party set off, Rainy Day leading the way, with Golizo, and both of the Indians using their long knives to cut down the *pica-pica* vines that barred the way.

"Don't touch those vines, if you can help it," cautioned the professor. "The pods contain a thistle-

down which will irritate your skin worse than a rash." And this Frank soon found to be true. One of the pods burst, and let a little of the down inside of his collar-band, where it soon burned him "like a mustard plaster," as he declared.

On the route to the ancient church they first beheld what the ants of Nicaragua can do. In one spot a score of mounds were to be counted, and the ants numbered millions upon millions. They had roads running in all directions, and the Indians told our friends that nothing could alter the ways of the ants.

"Build up hut here, and um ant trabel over him all time," said Golizo. "All kind ant, too—black, red, white, an' silber. Silber ant, him werry bad. Get into ear an' nose, maybe."

"Excuse me from having silver, or any other kind of ants, in my ears and nose," said Sam. "Let us move on;" and they did.

"Speaking of silver puts me in mind that it is said this section of Nicaragua is full of silver ore," said the professor. "When Spain ruled here the mines were kept working night and day. But of late years the industry has fallen by the wayside."

They had already met with several small snakes, and now Rainy Day suddenly made a slash with his

long knife at a reptile hanging from a thick bush in front of him. Off came the snake's head, and the body fell to the ground, where it whipped around in lively fashion for some time.

"Um *neicha-kaneicha*," declared Golizo. "Call um coral snake. Bad snake, dat. Him werry much poison."

"Ugh!" said Hockley, with a shiver. "This route seems full of surprises. I vote we go back."

But the ruins of the ancient church were now in sight, and the others demurred. Keeping their eyes wide open, they advanced cautiously, and presently reached the open space around the edifice, which was inclosed by a crumbled stone wall.

The church proper was but a small affair, built of stone, with barred windows. It had been given over to the birds, beasts, and snakes for nearly a century, and the very flooring was covered with moss and trailing vines. Over the doorway was a quaint carving, with Spanish lettering, which Amos Strong translated.

"It reads: 'The Church of Saint Thomas. Built by Order of Philip, the King,'" he said. "There must have been quite a colony here at one time, to use such a worshiping place."

"Spaniards werry hard here," said Rainy Day, patting his heart. "Hurt Indians much. Indians no like um, no. Indians fight, Spaniards run away. Dat many, many moons ago."

"It is the old, old story," said Amos Strong. "Spain has constantly played the oppressor, and, as a consequence, is losing every foothold she ever possessed."

The ruins were not as interesting as they had expected. But the walk had tired them, and they were glad to remain there until nearly dark, before starting back to the lake shore.

"We can sail in the evening," said Amos Strong. "Rainy Day says he knows the way perfectly, and it will be moonlight."

"A sail in the moonlight will be glorious!" cried Mark. "Last night, when I looked at the lake in the moonlight, it was like a vast sheet of silver."

"It put me in mind of a trip I once took from Chicago to Milwaukee, on Lake Michigan," put in Darry. "The moon was full, and the lake very calm, and our folks and myself sat up till after twelve o'clock, taking in the sight."

"Do you remember our trip on Lake Maracaibo,

in Venezuela?" said Mark. "That wasn't such a picnic."

So the talk ran on, as they picked their way down the hills toward the shore of the lake. Rainy Day and Golizo were again in advance, and often stopped to clear away the vines and the cacti. The latter were overrun with immense spiders, some as large as a hen's egg, with thick, hairy legs, and bulging eyes that glared wickedly at them.

"Some few of these spiders are poisonous," said the professor; "but the great majority are harmless to man."

"Well, I don't want any of them to bite me," declared Sam. "The very sight of those big fellows is enough to give one the nightmare."

They were passing through a grove of calabash trees. The fruit hung low, and they knocked off half a dozen shells, which Darry and Frank said they were going to take along for cups and bottles; for they had seen some native women at work in Costello making such articles from the coverings of the melon-like fruit.

At last they came in sight of the lake. The sun was setting behind the distant mountain, and al-

ready the long shadows were beginning to cast themselves over the shore and beyond.

Suddenly Rainy Day, who had gone on somewhat faster than the rest, set up a shout of alarm.

"What can that mean?" demanded Amos Strong, and started off on a run, followed immediately by Golizo and the others.

The distance still to be covered to the camp was not great, and soon they reached the spot in a body. They met Rainy Day, just returning from the lake shore.

"Um boat gone!" declared the Indian. "*Polly* stolen!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE ROUT OF THE ENEMY

It was true—the *Polly* was gone; and that the craft had been taken by somebody, there could be no doubt. At the bow there had been a chain, with an iron bar which Rainy Day had driven into the sandy soil. There was the hole, showing how the bar had been knocked sideways, and wrenched from the soil.

“Who could have taken the boat?” questioned Mark, after several minutes had been passed in searching the vicinity.

No one could answer that question.

“Some bad Indians here,” said Rainy Day. “No like me. Maybe they take um.”

Rainy Day and Golizo conferred together in their native tongue, and then announced that they would start on a hunt for the missing boat, one going up the shore and the other down.

“That is satisfactory to me,” said Amos Strong. “And while they are gone, we can rest where we are.”

"But supposing they have trouble?" questioned Mark.

"If Golizo have trouble, come back for help," said the Indian youth. Rainy Day said nothing, but pointed to his long knife and to his bow and arrows. By this they knew he felt able to take care of himself. Golizo said both he and the other red man knew where light canoes could be found, if they wanted to paddle on the lake.

Left to themselves, Mark and the others spent a short time looking out upon the lake, in search of a sail. But darkness came on fast, as is usual in the tropics, and soon they could see little or nothing, for the rising moon proved to be somewhat clouded.

"We might as well get supper, and take it comfortably," observed Frank. "Stewing around will do no good."

With both Indians gone, Amos Strong and the boys were left to do their own cooking. There was no novelty about this, for they had often cooked a meal in the open, as my old readers know. Curiously enough, nothing in the camp had been touched. But many of their traps had been left in the sloop, and these were gone.

"We'll be in hard luck if the *Polly* isn't found," said Frank. "How shall we get back to the mainland?"

"That, I think, will not be so difficult," answered Amos Strong. "There is a small settlement on the lower end of this island. If put to it, we can walk there."

They took their time over supper, and then sat around for half an hour, the professor smoking some cigars he had purchased at Fort San Carlos. The boys found a pool of clear water, and would have gone in bathing, but did not know whether it would be safe. But they "washed up" thoroughly, which was some satisfaction.

Slowly the moon came up, and when clear of clouds it made the tropical scene almost as bright as day. But there was the promise of more rain in the air, and soon the moon went under a dense mass of clouds.

As hour after hour went by, and Rainy Day and Golizo did not return, the boys became sleepy. Hockley was the first to drop off, and his example was quickly followed by Darry and Frank. Sam and Mark took another look out on the lake, while the professor threw some additional wood on the fire,

and then these three followed the others to the land of dreams.

Although he had said nothing to the boys, Amos Strong decided to sleep "with one eye open." He had done this often while on hunting trips in years gone by, and when he lay down it was with the determination to rouse up at the slightest sound.

For half an hour the professor slept, and then the cracking of some dead brushwood caused him to open his eyes and be alert. The fire was burning dimly, and by the uncertain rays he saw a man standing not far away. The fellow had a heavy club in his hands, and was evidently trying to assure himself that all in the camp were asleep.

The professor had scarcely noted this much when he heard more cracking of brushwood, and another man stepped into the opening, also club in hand. As the firelight fell on the individual, Amos Strong recognized one of the oarsmen of Ramon Malaya's boat! Then he recognized the other man. It was Ramon Malaya himself!

Feeling that the Spaniards were on the point of attacking them, the professor leaped to his feet, and for his gun, which he had brought along, and which rested against the tree nearest to him.

"Up, boys, up!" he cried. "We are in the midst of our enemies! Up, all of you!"

The cries aroused all of the others, and in a twinkling Mark sprang up, followed by Sam.

"Who is it?" demanded the former, as he caught up a stick with which he had provided himself during the journey to the church.

"Ramon Malaya and his men!"

As Amos Strong spoke he leveled his gun at the Spaniard. Like a flash the club of the second Spaniard was flung at the gun, knocking it from the tutor's hands.

"We are discovered! We must run for it!" came, in Spanish, from Ramon Malaya, and he started to retreat, followed closely by the man who had thrown the club and two other individuals, including Manuel Nonti.

By this time the camp was in an uproar. All the boys were on their feet, Hockley and Darry rubbing their eyes in an effort to grow awake. Sam had a pistol, and the others caught up sticks and clubs, while Amos Strong once more secured his gun.

That Malaya and his followers were frightened was plainly evident, for they crashed through the jungle madly, moving down the shore. Evidently

they had hoped to catch all of the party sleeping and had imagined they could knock our friends unconscious with the clubs before resistance could be offered.

"Let us go after them!" cried Sam, flourishing his pistol. "I want to know why they came here."

"They came to rob us, and perhaps to murder us," answered Mark.

By this time the boys were pressing forward, and, seeing he could not hold them back, and as anxious as any of them to learn what it all meant, Amos Strong took the lead.

"*Halte!*" he cried, in Spanish. "Stop, or I will fire on you!" And then he discharged the gun, sending a charge of buckshot over the heads of the fleeing Spaniards.

The midnight marauders had now reached the shore, at a spot where there was a tiny inlet, screened in by brushwood and drooping trees. Here, in the uncertain light, a boat could be seen at anchor.

"I'll wager that is the *Polly!*" ejaculated Frank. "They brought her here so that we couldn't get away."

"I believe they planned this attack as soon as they found out we wouldn't sail on their boat," put in

Sam. "They wanted to rob us of all the money we carry. More than likely they tried to get all the money that other time, when they took what Mark and Darry were carrying."

The would-be robbers had disappeared for a moment, but now they came into sight, close to the boat.

"Let that boat alone!" cried Amos Strong. "Go, or I will fire again!" And then, as two of the men leaped on board, he discharged the gun a second time.

This was no warning shot, but something meant to take effect, and a portion of the buckshot took two men in the arms and shoulders. There were sharp cries of pain and muttered imprecations, and two pistol shots rang out in return, but doing no damage. Then the Spaniards left the boat and continued on their way up the shore, where they had left the craft they had used in coming to the island.

"Shall we follow them?" questioned Sam, who was anxious to discharge the pistol.

"No," answered Amos Strong, who was afraid that one or another of his protégés might get hurt. "They have left the boat to us, and the best we can

do is to take the craft and return to camp. I do not imagine they will bother us again in a hurry."

They found the *Polly* in good condition, and leaping on board prepared to go back to their original landing place. At that moment came a hail out of the darkness.

"It is Golizo," cried Darry. He called in return, and soon the Indian youth put in an appearance. He had heard the firing and seen some men rushing up the shore, and wished to know what it all meant.

"I tell you dat," he said. "Malaya werry bad man, so udders, too. Da be best killed," and he nodded his head vigorously. He was pained to think that he had passed the inlet without discovering the hidden sloop.

It did not take the party long to return to the camp, and once there Golizo set off on a run to bring in Rainy Day. But the older Indian had also heard the shooting and shouting, and was on the return. He was more than pleased to get back his craft and find her totally uninjured and with all the remaining stores still on board.

"I watch while udders sleep," he said, and fixed up the camp fire, which now had to be kept burning

with a thick smoke, to drive away a colony of mosquitoes that had appeared.

It was some little time before the boys could calm down and get to sleep. The excitement had its full effect upon Sam, and half an hour later he aroused them all by having a nightmare.

"Come on, shoot 'em all down!" he muttered, as he got up. "Give it to 'em!" And then, when Mark caught hold of him, he fought furiously until some water was dashed into his face.

"You're asleep, Sam, and dreaming!" cried Mark. "Wake up, old fellow, wake up!"

"Dear me!" came back sheepishly. "Did I—er—did I dream it all?" and the boy from Boston gazed around wonderingly.

"You were dreaming just now, yes. Going after Malaya's crowd was too much excitement for you."

"I—I suppose that is true, Mark. I thought we were having the hottest kind of a fight. I hope I didn't hurt you."

"Oh, that's all right, Sam, but don't do it again." And Mark rubbed his ear, where Sam had given him a "soaker," as Frank called it.

"I'll try not to," answered Sam.

And then all hands retired once more.

CHAPTER XVIII

ABOUT GOOD READING AND BAD

“I WONDER if we shall ever see Ramon Malaya again, Mark.”

“It is not likely, Frank,” was the answer. “Now that he knows his true character has been discovered, he will take good care to keep out of sight.”

The boys were finishing an early breakfast. Golizo had awakened them at six o'clock, having already prepared the meal, to which everyone did full justice.

It was not long after this that the mainsail of the *Polly* was hoisted, and they stood away from Ometepe Island, with its two frowning volcano peaks.

The day was clear and remarkably cool, and a stiff breeze sent them bowling merrily on their course over water as clear as crystal and amid small and large patches of land, overgrown with reeds and bushes. These patches were the homes of innumerable birds, and during the forenoon all took turns at bringing down such game as was new to them. Once

Mark shot what he supposed was a duck, but it fell in deep water and before they could get to it a shark appeared and dragged it under.

"Gone!" cried Darry. "I tell you what, sharks are thick in this lake."

"Too thick for comfort," answered Hockley, and gave a shiver as he thought of his narrow escape.

They made good progress, and the breeze continuing they kept straight on until Granada came into view, perched in step-like fashion near the head of the lake. There was a long wharf extending over the marshy ground and among the reeds, and at this they tied up.

Half an hour later found them at the main hotel of the city, a comfortable two-storied affair, located on a corner of the public square. Here they found that their trunks had already arrived by the river and lake steamers the day before.

As soon as they landed Rainy Day and Golizo reported to the local authorities the attempted stealing of the sloop, and also mentioned the fact that two of the boys had lost their money while in company with Malaya and his men. As a consequence one of the local officials came to the hotel and held a talk with Professor Strong.

"If we hear anything of the missing money we will let you know," said the official on parting.

At Granada, Rainy Day was paid off and also Golizo. The older Indian prepared at once to return to Fort San Carlos, but the youth begged that he might be allowed to remain with the party longer. But they could not use him, and so he was dropped, much to his regret.

"But I shan't forget you, Golizo," said Darry, on parting, and he slipped some extra money into the honest lad's hand.

After their experience at Greytown and other places in Nicaragua the boys were agreeably surprised to find Granada large, well-built, and clean. There were several streets lined with stores, a group of nice public buildings, a market, a theater, and a public park, at which last place a military band occasionally gave concerts.

What struck all as peculiar were the various elevations of the streets. Every few houses or stores would have a level of their own, and to get to the next one had to climb up or down a set of steps or steep "chicken walks," as Frank called them.

"That is because the back of the town is so much higher than the front," said Amos Strong. "You

will find very much the same thing at Newburgh, N. Y., and at other river towns."

Business appeared to be brisk in Granada, in strong contrast to doings at Greytown, and the streets and the railroad station were alive with people.

"Where does the railroad run to?" questioned Darry.

"To Masaya and Managua, the capital of Nicaragua. At present the line is only about thirty miles long, but it is proposed to extend it to the head of Lake Managua."

"This looks like quite an old city," came from Sam.

"Granada is very old. It was founded by Cordova in 1522. In 1856 the filibuster Walker came here and burnt the place from end to end, so that what you see is really a new town, although of ancient architecture. There is, as you see, a fair amount of shipping, and back in yonder hills are very rich coffee and cacao plantations. There is also a factory here where they make what are known as 'Panama' watch chains, of gold wire."

"I've heard of such chains, and I am going to get one to send to my mother."

They had concluded to remain in Granada several days, to rest up after the trip from Greytown. The boys spent a large part of the time in sightseeing and in lolling in the hammocks swung in the *patio* of the hotel. The air was balmy here and Frank said he felt like sleeping most of the time.

"I don't wonder the natives get lazy," he declared. "It's a regular dreamlike atmosphere."

Hockley soon grew tired of the sights and on the second afternoon found a secluded nook of the *patio* and sat down to devour a half-dime "library" he had stowed away in the bottom of his trunk.

It was a deeply thrilling narrative, entitled "The Cross-Trail of Blood; or, Foxy Ferret, the Overland Detective," and depicted the marvelous work of a youth of fifteen, who by his astonishing skill had become the chief of the secret-service workers. A horrible murder had been committed, and Foxy had already run two of the evil-doers to earth, and was on the trail of the third and last, when a hand was placed on Hockley's shoulder, and, looking up, he found himself confronted by Amos Strong.

"Are you enjoying yourself, Jacob?" asked the

professor, as he dropped into a vacant seat beside the youth.

Had Hockley had the opportunity he would have put the half-dime novel out of sight, but it was too late, and he faced the tutor with a face that was unusually red.

"I—I just picked this thing up," he stammered.

"Will you let me see it?"

"I—I don't think you will be interested, sir."

"Nevertheless, I should like to look it over." Amos Strong took the "library." "I see you have read all but the last page. Won't you tell me what it is all about?"

The professor spoke very smoothly, and the lank youth hardly knew what it meant. He had expected a harsh lecture, and that the pamphlet would be torn into bits then and there. Instead, the tutor was studying the picture on the cover, where two men in red shirts and blue trousers were aiming yellow guns at the boy detective, dressed in green, with blue boots.

"They have some remarkably colored clothing, haven't they?" went on Amos Strong, holding the picture up. "Don't know that I ever saw blue boots before, nor yellow guns. Did you?"

"Don't know as I have," replied Hockley faintly. "I—I guess the artist was striving for a poster effect," and he grinned weakly.

"Perhaps. Now what about the story, Jacob?"

"Oh, I know you won't be interested."

"But you seemed to be interested. Tell me what it is about."

"Oh, it's a young detective. He was hired by a beautiful girl to track down the murderer of her rich uncle. Three men killed the old man, and ran away with half a million dollars he had in gold and silver. The detective tracked one man to San Francisco and had him arrested. Then he took a train to Mexico City, and the following night he caught the second man in a gambling den there. He was on the track of the third fellow, who had fled to Canada, when you came up, sir."

"Ah, I see. They covered a good deal of ground, didn't they? How was the money carried off?"

"In bags."

"Did the three thieves walk off with it?"

"At first, through a woods. But five miles away they got their horses. Oh, it was a daring deed!" and Hockley's face lit up at the thought.

"Half a million in gold and silver, eh?"

"Yes, sir, half gold and half silver."

"They must have been unusually strong, it seems to me. Half a million dollars in gold and silver, half and half, would weigh a great deal. At a rough estimate the silver alone would weigh six or eight tons, and the gold half a ton more. Divide six tons between three men, and we find that each man carried two tons—and I presume he did it in a hurry, too."

Hockley stared in astonishment.

"Two tons apiece!" he gasped. "They couldn't carry that."

"But you said the story says so. Another thing worth looking into is the fact that the detective traveled from San Francisco to Mexico in—how long did you say?"

"From noon of one day to midnight of the next."

"Thirty-six hours. I haven't a map handy, but I know the distance from San Francisco to Mexico City is not less than sixteen or eighteen hundred miles. Now if there was an air-line railroad from one city to the other he would have to travel at the rate of fifty miles an hour to get there. But there is no air-line, and to get there by the railroads of to-day he would have to travel about a hundred miles

an hour, up mountain and down—an impossible feat even with the best of modern locomotives.”

“I—I guess the author drew on his imagination.”

“I think so myself, Jacob, and drew strongly, too. I have no doubt that if you will go over the story carefully you will find many statements just as absurd as those I have pointed out. At the very start, the idea of a boy being a chief of detectives is ridiculous. It takes years of experience to become even an ordinarily good detective, and then they never do such marvelous thing as are mentioned in these gaudy-covered pamphlets. These tales are an insult to one’s understanding and common sense.”

“I guess you are right,” answered Hockley, thinking of several other improbable things he had not mentioned to his tutor. Then of a sudden he tore the book into half a dozen pieces. “That’s the end of it!” he cried.

“I am glad to see you look at it in the same light that I do,” said Amos Strong. “These stories will never do you any good, and they may do you harm.”

“But a fellow must read something.”

“To be sure, and I have no objection to your reading a good story book occasionally. But if I

were you, I'd sandwich them in between first-class books of travel, biography, and history. To read fiction alone will never make one intellectually strong."

"I like to read the biographies of the Indian fighters."

"Because, I presume, they are full of action. I used to read them myself, and they are what led me to become something of a hunter. But you will find other lives just as interesting. Take, for instance, Washington and his early days when he was a young surveyor, and Lincoln and Garfield when they were poor boys, and Grant when he was a young soldier during the war with Mexico, and the late President McKinley when he was a daring young private in the Civil War, and a hundred and one others, soldiers, sailors, and statesmen. And then there are the lives of the great inventors and discoverers, and the explorers—those who have thrown open so much that is new to us in this world of ours—Peary in the Far North and Stanley in the heart of equatorial Africa, and missionaries like Dr. Livingstone."

"I have read a little about Africa and the North Pole."

"And, then, history is just as interesting—if you

choose the right kind. If you like to read about Indians, read how our forefathers settled in our country, and of the many fights they had. And of how our country prospered, and of the battles we had for freedom. You studied this in school, but you should read the histories that are meant for popular and not class use. You come from Pennsylvania. I suppose you have been in Pittsburg."

"Oh, yes, several times. My father has a lumber yard on the river there."

"Well, then, when you read about the early life of Washington you will read something of Pittsburg. It was merely a fort then, called by the French Fort Duquesne, and it was there that the future President of our country had his first great military battle, taking command after the fall of General Braddock. That battle is as thrilling to read about as anything ever put in a dime novel—and the story is true, which is the best part of it."

At that moment the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Frank. The youth came up panting for breath and had evidently been running.

"Sam is in trouble," he announced. "He went out to buy something and got into a mess somehow. He wants you to come and help him."

CHAPTER XIX

FROM GRANADA TO MANAGUA

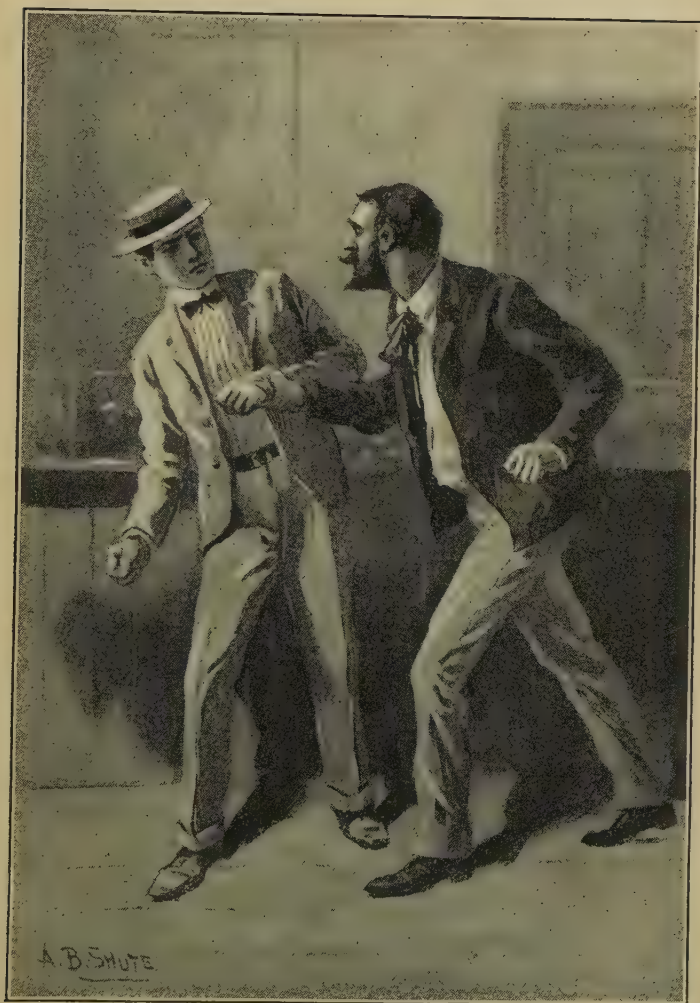
SAM was indeed in trouble, and through no fault of his own.

Leaving Mark, Frank, and Darry to return to the hotel, after having purchased some photographic supplies for Mark's camera, Sam had wandered off in the direction of a shop where were displayed a number of the "Panama" chains already mentioned.

Going inside, he looked over a number of the pieces of jewelry and finally selected two chains, one to send to his mother, and the other for an aunt who resided in Philadelphia.

The purchase came to six dollars, native money, and to pay for the same Sam produced two five-dollar gold pieces which he had been carrying in his pocket since leaving Fort San Carlos.

The native shopkeeper, an old Nicaraguan with gray beard and hair, was a careful man, and before



He caught Sam by the arm and glared at him fiercely.
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accepting the gold took it to a window for examination.

This evidently did not satisfy him, and to make certain he brought forth a tiny vial of liquid, from which he allowed a drop to fall on each of the yellow pieces.

Both turned black.

Sam did not see this performance, being engaged in looking over some curiously twisted snake rings in a showcase.

“Ha!” cried the shopkeeper, and added half a dozen words in Spanish. Then he caught Sam by the arm and glared at him fiercely.

“Yankee no cheat me!” he ejaculated. “No cheat Beppo, no! Gif Beppo back da chains!”

“What’s wrong?” questioned Sam in wonder.

“Gif back da chains! You are a thief! a rascal! a murderer!”

The voice of the old shopkeeper arose to a shriek, and in a moment a crowd began to collect in front of the shop and several came inside. Among the latter were two stand-keepers from across the way.

“What is it, Beppo?” questioned one, in Spanish.

“He has given me bad money—two gold pieces.”

"Ha, the villain! You are sure they are bad?"

"Sure. I tried them and they turned black. They are as bad as the gold piece you received last week, Juan."

"The thief! He must be locked up!" cried several, and in a twinkling three men caught hold of Sam, dragging him rudely forward.

"Hold on! What does this mean?" demanded the youth, trying to break away. "Let go of my pocket!"

Beppo had his hand in the pocket which held the chains. Now he brought the purchased articles forth.

"If you want the chains back, give me back my money," went on Sam.

A hubbub arose, half a dozen men speaking at once. The youth could not make out a word of what was said, but soon found himself on the sidewalk, surrounded by a mob that numbered twenty-five or thirty. Several were shaking their fists, and one man lifted a club as if to strike him to the earth.

It was at this moment that Sam caught sight of Frank and raised a cry for assistance. At once his chum ran up.

"What is wrong?" demanded Frank.

"Get the professor," answered Sam, who was being shoved along faster than ever. "Tell him I'm in trouble."

"But what about, Sam?"

"That is more than I know. I went into the shop to buy something and they pounced on me before I had a chance to turn myself. Run for the professor, quick!"

"I will," and Frank set off at top speed, reaching the hotel all out of breath, as already related.

Amos Strong was alarmed, thinking that matters might be taking a serious turn with Sam. He rushed off without delay, and Mark and Hockley accompanied him.

He found the boy from Boston at the city jail, in the custody of a police official, to whom he had just been delivered by Beppo and his fellow shopkeepers. The old jeweler was trying to explain the situation, and had brought forth the two blackened money pieces as evidence. Amos Strong listened to the charge as calmly as he could, while Sam looked on with a gradual understanding of what it all meant.

"You are charged with passing, or trying to pass, two gold pieces said to be counterfeit," said Professor Strong, as soon as he could be heard.

"If they are bad I didn't know it," answered Sam.

"I don't suppose you did, Samuel. Do you remember where the gold came from? I did not give it to you."

"No, you gave me nothing but silver. Let me see." The youth thought for a moment. "Oh, yes, I remember now. I got that gold from Ramon Malaya."

"Is it possible! And how was that?"

"He came to me at Fort San Carlos, right after you told him you didn't want him any longer, and said he wanted to pay off his men, and would I give him change for the gold? I didn't want to carry so much heavy silver in my pocket, so I let him have the change. I thought at the time it was rather strange that he should come to me instead of getting change at some shop."

"He was more of a rascal than we imagined. I am afraid we are going to have serious trouble over this," added Amos Strong.

It took a deal of talking on the part of the professor to make the jail officials believe what he had to say. Beppo insisted that Sam be locked up, but was finally quieted when Amos Strong said he would

pay for all damage done, even to the old shopkeeper's feelings. This suited the wily shopkeeper, who was of an avaricious turn, and he finally agreed to drop the prosecution if paid a sum equal to two dollars of United States money. More money had to be paid at the jail to have the charge against Sam taken from the books, and it would not have been quashed at all had it not been for the charge already entered against Ramon Malaya by Rainy Day and Golizo.

"This Ramon Malaya must be in with the counterfeiters who are trying to flood Nicaragua with bad money," said one of the officials to Amos Strong. "And if so, it will give us great pleasure to lay our hands upon him."

When they returned to the hotel Sam was still excited over what had occurred. The counterfeit pieces had been left at the jail, but for these he did not care.

"I don't want to go out on the streets of Granada again, at least not alone," he said. "I'd be afraid of being mobbed."

"Well, we can start for Masaya to-morrow," returned the professor; and they did.

The boys found the railroad a primitive affair,

with small and ill-ventilated cars. Yet the ride was a delightful one, skirting the foothills of Lake Managua, and crossing several pretty streams. Here, at one spot, was a profusion of wild flowers, and often they ran through a perfect cloud of butterflies.

"What a paradise for a butterfly collector," observed Mark.

The ride was soon at an end and they rolled into the comfortable station at Masaya, a town boasting nearly twenty thousand inhabitants, a large proportion of whom are Indians. The red men were everywhere, quite in contrast to Granada, ten or twelve miles away.

"This ought to be called Basketville," said Mark, as he pointed to the numerous stalls where fancy baskets made by the Indian women were on sale. "They make fine things, don't they?"

They were going to stop in Masaya but a few hours,—from one train to the next,—and after dining at a tidy restaurant, where the bill of fare included Indian bread and baked chicken, they hired a carriage and drove around.

"It looks like some of the spots we visited in Porto Rico," said Frank. "See, the same thatched

huts, the same kind of watering places, and the same little gardens with their patches of vegetables, mostly onions and garlic."

"And the chickens and game-cocks," added Darry. "I suppose they have cock-fighting here the same as in other tropical countries."

"To be sure," put in Mark. "The proprietor of the hotel in Granada said they had a cock-fight billed to come off at the hotel next Sunday afternoon. He wanted me to bet on the birds—that is, his particular bird."

"In that case, they can't think much of Sunday," came from Hockley.

"There are all sorts of people here," said Amos Strong. "Some are very religious and many are not. As to cock-fighting, as I told you long ago, they have been brought up to consider it a national sport, and it will be many years before it is entirely wiped out. But it will eventually have to go, just as bull-fighting is fast dying out."

Near the railroad station was a fruit stand, and before boarding the train for Managua the professor purchased some fruit for the boys, including some luscious bananas (of the red variety, not the yellow, which are not bananas, but plantains) and some

alligator pears and native grapes, large and solid, and plums which were as sweet as sugar.

“With care they can grow almost anything here,” said Professor Strong. “But coffee, cacao, and tobacco are the main products of this section. After this we will pass miles and miles of plantations, as you will see.”

From Masaya to Managua is only a run of half an hour, and so the capital was reached before night-fall. The city is located on the shore of the lake after which it is named, and is of recent construction. Consequently the buildings are modern in appearance, and our friends found no difficulty in securing comfortable quarters. They found everything clean and well kept, much to Sam’s satisfaction, for the boy from Boston was somewhat fastidious in his tastes.

CHAPTER XX

DEER, AND A WILD TAPIR

TEN days were spent in Managua and in a run up to Leon, and each was filled with interest to the young explorers.

During that time they took a boat ride on the lake, visiting Mount Momotombo, which threw out a dense smoke visible for miles, and half a dozen towns and villages. They also drove out to a large coffee plantation, and to a new sugar factory which had just been erected.

During their stop at one of the villages they witnessed the native manner of shoeing an ox. The beast was tied up front and back on two planks, his forelegs being fastened down at the knees. In this situation he could not budge, so that the process of putting on rough iron shoes was a comparatively safe one, no matter how much the ox suffered.

"That beats horse-shoeing," observed Darry. "Imagine a horse in the States standing such treatment."

During the stop at Managua Mark took a number of interesting photographs, which he developed and printed himself at the hotel, where he used a pantry for a dark room. The printed copies came out well, and he gave each of the boys and the professor some, to keep or to send home, as they wished.

"You are getting to be quite an expert," said Amos Strong. "By the time we return to the States you will have a truly valuable collection."

From Managua it was proposed to go southward to Rivas, which is located near the western shore of Lake Nicaragua, and on the line of the canal from the lake to the Pacific Ocean. This would take them through the heart of the mountainous region of Nicaragua, and the prospect delighted Darry and Frank, especially the former, for they were to journey on horses hired at Managua.

"This section of the country is what is known as the Western Divide," said the professor. "There are some tall mountains here, but down near the proposed canal the country is lower than almost anywhere from Alaska down into South America. I am told the road is fairly good, although the country as a whole is exceedingly wild."

It had rained the day before, but when they started

the sky was blue and without a cloud. Their baggage had been sent on ahead, and they carried only a few articles with them, including their guns, for all were anxious to do a little hunting.

"How far is it to Rivas?" asked Mark.

"About sixty-five miles by the roads. But some of the hills are steep, so if we make the distance in three or four days we will be doing pretty well."

"I want to shoot a bear or something big," said Frank.

"I don't think you'll find a bear, Frank. But you may strike something equally dangerous, so be on your guard."

The route lay along the mountains, with many a steep hill to climb, as Amos Strong had said. In every direction stretched the tropical jungle, with its indigo, redwood, calabash, and other trees, and its plantains and ferns without number. Occasionally they would see a vine well known throughout Central America, and known locally as the "strangler." This winds itself around some of the most sturdy trees and by constant contraction at last binds the tree so closely that it withers away and dies.

"What a nasty vine!" said Sam. "I shouldn't want one of them to twist itself around me."

"Old travelers tell all sorts of stories about this vine," said Amos Strong. "It used to be said that they would hang themselves over a road, and when a man came along they would encircle him and hold him until he died."

It was not a great while after this that a turn of the road brought them in sight of a flock of birds. Darry and Sam took a shot at them and brought down four. They proved to be blackbirds, with the rich and deep plumage peculiar to Nicaragua and Costa Rica. A little while later Hockley took a shot and brought down a quail which sat on a bush only a rod away. Then the professor brought down a bird that looked somewhat like a cross between a black hen and an ostrich.

"This is what is called a tinamou," said Amos Strong. "They are to be found nearly everywhere during the warm season. See, this bird has a nest at the foot of yonder tree."

"And there are four bright blue eggs in it," declared Mark, after an examination. "Let us take them along, now the mother bird is dead." And they did so. But before the trip to Rivas came to an end the eggs were broken and had to be thrown away.

Shooting birds was all well enough, but the boys were looking for big game, and they were delighted, on stopping at the village of Masatepe, to be told that half a dozen deer had been seen in that vicinity only the day previous.

"Oh, just give me a shot at a big deer!" cried Mark. "I'll do my best to bring him down with one bullet."

The next day the road led up a hillside, and a turn a mile further on brought them to a bit of dense jungle, running along something of a cliff. Below was a broad plateau, covered with grass.

"There are the deer, sure as you are born!" burst out Frank, as he pointed down to the plateau.

Mark turned in time to see three of the animals moving toward a dense clump of brushwood. Before anybody could raise his weapon the deer were out of sight.

The young explorers were now aroused, and all begged of the professor to be allowed to climb down the cliff to go in quest of the game. Amos Strong was willing, and said he would accompany them.

The horses were tethered by the roadside, and

Mark led the way to where a series of rough rocks led to the bottom of the cliff. The way was rough, and in going down Frank slipped and fell some distance, tearing his coat sleeve. He gave a cry, and the others went to his assistance, but found him unhurt.

At the bottom they divided—Mark, Frank, and Sam going around to the left, and the professor, Darry, and Hockley moving around to the right. Before separating Amos Strong cautioned each to be careful about pulling a trigger unless he was certain of what he was aiming at.

"I don't want one of you to kill another," he concluded.

The deer had moved off to a large wood east of the plateau, and both parties had to make wide détours to keep out of sight and scent of the game.

The trail took Amos Strong, Darry, and Hockley into something of a hollow, into which flowed the water of the plateau. Here were more rough rocks and heavy sword-like grass, and progress was necessarily slow.

"This is no picnic," growled Hockley, as he paused to wipe the perspiration from his face. "The sun makes this spot like a bake-oven."

"We'll soon be out of it," whispered the professor. "But keep silent now, or the deer will hear us, and be off again."

Darry managed to keep close upon the professor's heels, but the youth from Pennsylvania lagged behind until the others were almost out of his sight. Then his foot began to hurt him, and he sat down on a rock to examine his shoe.

Hockley was sitting thus, with his gun across his knees, when a slight rustle in the bushes beside the water reached his ears. Gazing in the direction, he saw a body suddenly emerge from a hollow. It was brown, and the hair was somewhat shaggy, and the youth thought it must be a bear.

He started to cry for help, and at the same time raised his gun. His nervous fingers pulled the trigger before he had a good aim, and the bullet merely grazed the animal's neck. There was a roar of pain and rage, and the beast charged straight for Hockley.

It was a tapir, sometimes called a *danta* by the people of Nicaragua. It was as large as a small horse, with thick, chunky legs, and a long snout which curved down over its mouth.

As a general thing, the Central American tapir

is not of a ferocious nature, and they are often tamed by the natives, when they become as playful as a tamed bear. But the beast in its wild state sometimes becomes exceedingly ugly; and that was what happened on the present occasion.

With a yell of terror, Hockley tumbled backward over the rock and dropped his gun. Then, as the tapir came closer, he scrambled up and began to tear along the ravine in the direction Professor Strong and Darry had taken.

"Help! help!" he screamed. "Stop him, somebody, or I'll be torn to pieces!"

Both of those in advance heard the call, and Darry was the first to turn, for the professor was on the rocks, climbing out of the ravine.

"What is it, Jake?"

"Some big brown beast. Here it comes. Shoot it, quick!" And in another moment Hockley plunged up to where Darry was standing. His hat was gone, and his face was as pale as a sheet.

Darry did not stop to think twice. The tapir was now less than two rods off, and it was easy to see that the beast meant to charge on the two boys. Up came his weapon, and bang! it went off, the charge of buckshot landing in the creature's left side.



With a yell of terror, Hockley tumbled backward. — *Page 192.*

“ Hurrah, I got him ! ” cried Darry, as the tapir stumbled and fell. But scarcely had he spoken, when the wounded beast arose once more, with a wild snort, and came on, as if to reach and maul them, no matter what the cost.

CHAPTER XXI.

ALONG THE PACIFIC

“JUMP for the rocks, boys!”

It was a command from the professor. He had leaped down, and was coming forward with long strides.

Catching Hockley by the shoulder, Darry pushed him to the side of the ravine, where the rough rocks led to the top.

This was just what Amos Strong wanted. They were now out of the way of his aim, and in a trice his heavy rifle rang out, the ball taking the tapir fairly and squarely in the right eye. The beast gave a leap, and then fell back, dead.

“Good! You have finished him!” ejaculated Darry, looking back to see the effect of the shot. “My, what a big fellow!”

They were soon at the tapir’s side, Hockley still trembling so that he could scarcely stand. Darry was also agitated. Both asked what the beast was, and then remembered that they had seen such

a creature before, Darry in a circus menagerie, and Hockley at Fairmount Park, in Philadelphia.

“Your first shot was what made the tapir wild,” said Amos Strong. “If you had tried to shoo him off in the first place, it is more than likely he would have run away from you, instead of coming to the attack.”

They now heard shots in the distance, and, climbing out of the ravine, saw that the other party had stirred up the deer and set two of them to running over the lower boundary of the plateau. As quickly as they could, Amos Strong and Darry fired on the last of the animals, and it went down, shot in the side and in the neck. The other got away, and was seen no more.

In the meantime the boys in Mark's party had another deer to their credit. He was a fine buck, with a pair of good-sized and sharp horns. They had located him while he was feeding in the brush, and all three had fired simultaneously and hit the game in almost the same place.

By the time all came together again, Hockley had regained his gun. The tall youth felt rather sheepish over the way he had run from the tapir after his

shot, and insisted upon it that the beast had leaped at him from the rocks without warning.

"He wasn't more than a couple of steps off," he declared; "and he came at me slam-bang before I could turn my head."

"He came running toward me, yelling like a wild Indian," said Darry to Mark, in a whisper. "He was scared to death. But then I guess I should have been scared, too, if I'd been in his place."

"Well, it has been a very satisfactory hunt, after all," declared Professor Strong. "Two deer and a tapir, not to mention the birds, is not bad;" and all the others agreed with him.

The night was spent at the village of Nandaime, at the home of a French-American surveyor, who had worked on both the Nicaragua and the Panama canal routes. The surveyor, whose name was Jules Chalmette, had grown tired of his profession, and having a good chance to buy a rich plantation near Nandaime, had settled down and married a Nicaraguan belle of the vicinity.

The evening proved unusually warm, and so it was nearly midnight before anybody thought of going to bed. The boys lolled in hammocks under the high trees, and Amos Strong and the ex-surveyor

made themselves comfortable in big wicker rockers of Indian manufacture, and smoked native *puros* of first quality—cigars which in the United States would have been worth at least ten cents each, but which in Nicaragua cost but a cent or two.

The host had put in most of his time on the Panama Canal route, and had many stories to tell about his adventures. He had helped one of the French paymasters for a period of four months, and had been in this branch of the service at the time the paymaster was robbed of one hundred thousand francs—about \$19,000.

“I was not with M. Bozet on that night, being sick,” he said. “He had stopped at a small village not far from Colon, or Aspinwall, as you Yankees call it. The native robbers fell upon his strong-box at midnight, and bound him so that he was helpless. They took every sou.”

“How many were there of the robbers?” questioned Frank, who was deeply interested; and even Hockley pricked up his ears, for here was something really thrilling, and not out of a dime novel, either.

“The robbers were supposed to be seven or eight in number. They came and went in the darkness, so they could not be counted. A French guard discov-

ered them just after the money had been taken, and he gave the alarm, for which one of the robbers shot him through the shoulder."

"But the robbers were followed, weren't they?" asked Hockley.

"Yes. Inside of five minutes after the robbery occurred the whole village was aroused, and telegrams were sent to Colon, Panama, and other points. Then M. Bozet organized a posse to pursue the rascals. They were followed into the jungle and through some hills, and one man was shot and captured. But the others had fleet horses, and in the end they got away."

"Was the man who was shot, killed?"

"Not outright; but he was unconscious when picked up, and died two days later. His name was not known, but his face was remembered as one seen around Colon several times. He had on his body ten thousand francs, and that is all that was ever recovered."

"So over \$17,000 is still missing," said Sam, after a slight mental calculation.

"Yes, and likely to remain missing until the end of time," concluded Jules Chalmette.

The home of the ex-surveyor was a well-kept and

comfortable one, and the boys enjoyed a splendid night's rest there. Before they retired, Jules Chalmette had one of his native workmen bring out a long and thin-looking guitar, of home manufacture, upon which the native rendered half a dozen sweet and particularly soothing melodies.

While dressing, the next morning, Mark saw two of the little boys attached to the estate at play. They were at a native game, called "hit the spider," the spider in the case being a round wooden ball attached to a string fastened to a long peg driven into a flat wall. Back of the swinging ball was a board containing several round holes, located in something of a curved line. The players would throw balls at the swinging ball, in an endeavor to drive the latter into one of the holes of the board. The holes bore different numbers, that in the center being 1, and those on the right 2 and 4, and on the left 3 and 5. Twelve or 24 points won constituted a game.

"That looks easy," said Sam, when his attention was called to it; but on going downstairs and trying the game, he found it quite difficult to land the swinging ball into a hole, or spider's pocket, as it was called. Mark was more successful, and beat all his chums with ease.

"I don't wonder Mark beat," observed Darry, when the game was over. "He always was good on the throw. That's what makes him such a good ball player." Darry hadn't forgotten the baseball match in Havana against the Cuban team.

The weather continued good, and the remainder of the journey to Rivas occurred without incident. The boys looked for additional game, but nothing but a baby agouti came to view, and this no one cared to shoot. This animal, they were told afterward, is very rare in Nicaragua, and is gradually becoming thinned out farther to the southward.

"Rivas is located about three miles inland from Lake Nicaragua," said the professor, as they entered the town. "It is said to contain eight thousand people, but by the looks they must be very much scattered."

"I see a railroad of some sort," said Frank. "And there are a couple of old-fashioned cars and a dinky locomotive."

"This road runs to the lake, to the steamboat landing. I have heard that when the locomotive is not in use they take one of the cars and hitch a couple of mule teams to it for motive power."

The majority of the houses in Rivas were small,

and they had some trouble in finding a hotel. All noticed how clean the streets were, in contrast to some other towns visited.

“Directly below this town are two small rivers,” said the professor; “the Las Lajas, which flows into the lake, and the Grande, which empties into the Pacific. It is on the line of these two streams that it is proposed to build the western end of the Nicaragua Canal. On account of the mountains, it must be built with canal locks. The length of the canal from lake to ocean will be about fifteen miles.”

After a day of rest, they rode out and inspected the work down near the lake, and on the day following set out for Brito harbor, on the Pacific. The climbing was difficult, and all were glad when it reached an end and they came out on a rocky cliff overlooking the sea.

“Hurrah! The Pacific at last!” cried Mark.

“The first time I have seen it,” put in Sam, and swung his cap in the air as a salute.

“Let us go in bathing,” suggested Darry, and finding a favorable spot they did so, while the professor took it easy under some palms. The water felt cool and delicious, after the hot ride, and Mark

and Frank declared it was just as good as Coney Island or Asbury Park.

Just below Brito harbor is situated the village of San Juan del Sur, from which runs the submarine cable to Panama. It is quite a lively little town, and after the dip in the Pacific the party set out in that direction, arriving there in time for supper.

"This ends our sightseeing in Nicaragua," said Amos Strong. "About ten miles below here is the Bay of Salinas, which marks the boundary between this republic and that of Costa Rica. To-morrow we can strike out for Soledad, on the post road, and we can travel by that road directly southeastward to Alajuela, San José, Cartago, and other cities of importance."

At San Juan del Sur were located several shops, and also a number of low drinking resorts. In the cool of the evening Sam and Frank took a walk together, Sam being in quest of curios, as usual, to send to his mother.

The walk of the two boys took them past one of the drinking resorts mentioned, and as they passed Frank caught his chum by the arm.

"Listen!" he cried. "Do you recognize that voice?"

Sam came to a halt and listened. Three men inside of the place were conversing loudly, and one of the voices sounded strangely familiar.

"I think I do, Frank; but we had better look in and make sure."

"But we don't want to be seen."

"Here is a small side window. Let us peep into that."

They walked silently to the window mentioned. It was wide open, to admit the air, and from this point they could look into the resort with ease.

Half a dozen men were present, some sitting around a small table, and others standing before a low counter, which answered the purpose of a bar.

Two of the men were Ramon Malaya and his cousin, Manuel Nonti, and a third was one of the boatmen who had been shot during the rout on Ometepe Island!

CHAPTER XXII

A CAPTURE AND AN ESCAPE

"THE very fellows we want to find!" exclaimed Sam, after they had moved back from the window.

"We must tell the professor of this at once," returned Frank. "The authorities must bag them before they have a chance to slip away."

The distance to the boarding house at which they had left Amos Strong and the others was not great, and in a few minutes Sam found the professor, who was just preparing to take a walk with Hockley and Mark.

"Malaya, Nonti, and one of the boatmen!" exclaimed Amos Strong. "Yes, we must have them arrested, by all means. Where did you leave Frank?"

"He stayed to watch them, in case they went elsewhere."

In such a small town as San Juan del Sur it was no easy matter to find an official of any sort, but by good fortune there happened to be a government

employee at hand, who had been sent to that neighborhood to look up a smuggling case. He was a bright fellow, and listened to what Amos Strong had to tell with keen interest.

"Yes, I have heard of those counterfeits," he said, in Spanish. "You were fortunate to meet the rascals-again. It may prove to be an important capture."

It did not take long for the government official to find several men who were willing to aid him, and Amos Strong himself went with the body.

When the drinking resort was reached, Frank was found across the roadway, still on guard.

"No one but a young negro has come out," he said. "Some of the men went into a back room."

Without ceremony, the government official walked into the resort, followed by Amos Strong and three other assistants.

Almost instantly a wild hubbub arose, as Malaya, Nonti, and the wounded boatman realized how they were cornered.

"You shall not arrest me!" cried Ramon Malaya in Spanish, and leaped swiftly to a back door.

Nonti, the wounded boatman, and two others were between the speaker and the men after him,

and in the confusion Ramon Malaya managed to gain the open air, running with the swiftness of a deer.

The government official realized that he was the chief offender, and went after him. Several shots were fired, but none appeared to take effect, and in the end Ramon Malaya escaped to a mountain trail, along which it was next to impossible to follow him.

At first Manuel Nonti wished to fight, but he soon saw that the odds were against him, and so he put on an air of injured innocence.

"This is an outrage," he said, in his native tongue. "I am an innocent man, and have done absolutely nothing to warrant arrest. I shall make my enemies pay dearly for this."

The wounded boatman, however, broke down utterly. He was still suffering from the dose of buck-shot in his shoulder, and had drunk deeply to drown his pain.

"I am at your mercy, kind sir!" he whined to the government official. "Have pity on me, and I will confess all."

"Hold your tongue, Garosa!" shrieked Manuel Nonti. "Do not speak, or it will be the worse for you!"

“ He shall say what he pleases,” put in the government official sternly, and then he ordered that the two men be separated and handcuffed. At this, Manuel Nonti raved more than ever, but nobody paid any attention to him.

When examined, the wounded boatman admitted that the counterfeit gold had come from Ramon Malaya, and added that many hundreds of dollars of the stuff had been circulated throughout Nicaragua. Where it came from, he could not tell, but thought it was manufactured either in Costa Rica or Colombia. Malaya distributed the counterfeits to a dozen other men, including his cousin, Manuel Nonti, and these men worked the base coins off at every available opportunity.

“ But what about the attack on our party? ” questioned Amos Strong. “ That had nothing to do with your counterfeits.”

“ No, señor; that was planned by Manuel Nonti. He said you and the young men with you carried a large quantity of money on your persons—that he had seen some of the money on shipboard, on the way from Port-of-Spain to Greytown. It was getting rather hard to circulate the counterfeits without being detected, and so all of the boatmen were urged

to join in the attack upon your party, the haul to be divided equally. That you did not take our boat at Fort San Carlos upset our plans at first, and so Malaya and Nonti planned to follow you to Ometepe Island."

The boatman proved to be rather simple-minded, and both the government official and Amos Strong agreed that he had simply been a tool of Malaya and Nonti. Consequently he was held more as a witness than as one of the guilty parties, much to his satisfaction.

When removed from San Juan del Sur to Rivas, on the day following, Manuel Nonti was furious, especially at Amos Strong and the boys.

"I shall not forget you," he said darkly. "Remember that. And my Cousin Ramon will remember you, too!" And he shook his fist at them.

"What do you think he will do?" asked Mark somewhat uneasily.

"I do not see how he can do much of anything," answered the professor. "The government officials will look to it that he is given a long term of imprisonment; and even if he gets but a light sentence, we shall be out of the country long before he has served his time."

"But Ramon Malaya is still at large," put in Hockley. "The cousins think a good deal of each other. He will surely remember us, as Nonti said."

"Well, we shall have to keep on our guard, Jacob; I see nothing else to do."

"I am glad we are going to leave Nicaragua. Can't we take a boat down the coast? Then Ramon Malaya won't be able to get at us so easily. For all we know, he may be in hiding on the post road, and may shoot us as we pass."

"I will think the matter over," answered Amos Strong briefly.

He was no coward, and had he been alone he would undoubtedly have stuck to his original intention of using the post road into Costa Rica. But he felt that he was responsible for the welfare of those with him, and did not wish to run a risk that might be avoided.

A note he received that evening, three hours after Nonti's departure, decided him. It was brought in by a negro boy, who had received it on a mountain trail miles away.

"I have heard from my Cousin Manuel"—so the communication ran;—"you are responsible for his capture. Beware of me in the future."

The note was not signed, but Amos Strong knew very well that it had been written by Ramon Malaya.

"I will say nothing to the boys of this," he thought, as he tore the paper to pieces. "But we can take a boat down the coast, if one is to be had."

A craft carrying coffee and fruit had run into San Juan del Sur harbor the day before. The craft was bound for Arenas, on the Gulf of Nicoya, and it was an easy matter to arrange for passage to that port. The party went on board immediately, much to Hockley's satisfaction. Before leaving, Amos Strong signed several legal documents concerning the case against Manuel Nonti and his confederates.

The accommodations on the fruit boat were far from good, especially as the craft lacked ventilation, and the cook stewed onions almost continually, but as the run was one of but two hundred miles, and would take but two days, none complained. The time was spent either in reading, or in lying around taking it easy. The professor had brought along a map of Costa Rica, and on the morning of the second day he gave his pupils a short talk about the country.

"As you will see by the map, Costa Rica is an irregular strip of land, bounded on the north by Nic-

aragua and on the south by Colombia," he said. "To the eastward lies the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean, and to the westward the Pacific Ocean. On the Pacific side are two gulfs—that of Nicoya, for which we are now bound, and farther south, the Gulf of Dulce. Nicoya has an excellent harbor, and around it are located several cities, of more or less importance. Can any of you tell me what the name Costa Rica means in Spanish?"

"The Rich Coast," came from both Sam and Frank, who had been reading up a bit on their own account.

"Yes; and the country is rich in many things. Costa Rica coffee is well known, and I have learned that there are nearly eight thousand plantations there, containing over twenty-five million trees."

"Gracious! what a picking of coffee-beans there must be," came from Darry.

"The country also raises large quantities of corn, rice, potatoes, and *frigoles*, a black bean used in every household."

"Must be a cousin to the white bean of Boston," suggested Frank, and Sam gave him a poke in the ribs to quiet him.

"The country, taken as a whole, is very mountain-

ous," continued Amos Strong. "The peak of Blanco has an elevation of over two miles, and there are several volcano caps almost as tall."

"Excuse me, but I don't want to climb any more volcanoes; at least, not for a while," said Mark, as the professor paused.

"The forests of Costa Rica are unusually productive of heavy timber, and include ironwood, mahogany, bitter and sweet cedar, wild cinnamon, pomegranate, pawpaw, almond; *guacimo*, a species of acacia; the *lloron*, or weeping-tree, and many others which we have already met with in Venezuela and in the West Indies. Fruits also grow in abundance, including many melons, plums, some grapes, and the ever-present banana and plantain.

"The industries are fairly numerous for a country containing but 22,000 square miles, and a population of less than 250,000 people. First in importance is the curing of coffee and the raising of sugarcane, and next to these are the many brick-making yards, where both bricks and tiles are manufactured. There is also a very large national liquor factory, or distillery, that produces over a million dollars' worth of rum, alcohol, and other liquors per year."

"Well, that liquor factory won't get rich off this

crowd," put in Darry, and the way he spoke caused even the professor to smile.

"The raising of sugar is an ever-growing industry, and the Costa Ricans are putting in the best sugar-refining machinery to be purchased."

"Won't you tell us something about the money?" asked Hockley. "It seems to me I get mixed up on that nearly every place we go."

"The money system is simple, Jacob. There are one-dollar, two-dollar, five-dollar, and ten-dollar gold pieces; and fifty-cent, twenty-five-cent, ten-cent, and five-cent silver pieces. Of copper, there are the cent and the quarter-cent. American gold is at a slight premium, or was some years ago.

"Of the cities, the principal ones are San José, the capital; Alajuela, Heredia, and Cartago, all located somewhat in the center of the republic; Arenas, on the western coast, and Limon, on the Atlantic coast. The large cities are connected by a railroad, but the others have only wagon roads and mountain trails."

CHAPTER XXIII

SIGHTSEEING IN COSTA RICA

FOUR days later our friends found themselves at Alajuela, a pretty city, located on a wide plain, about twenty miles from the coast.

They had come from the seaport in a large *volante*, one of the old Spanish sort, which had brought them directly to the best hotel of which this city of nine thousand souls boasted.

After a day of rest they took a long walk, visiting the Municipal Palace, the National College, and the *cuartel*, said to be the finest in Costa Rica. They also witnessed a military drill of the soldiers of that district, which was certainly impressive, even if not as precise as that to be seen at West Point, or at a State encampment in our own country.

"This looks like a lively little place," said Mark, as they strolled down Guardia Street and turned into Estacion. "And the parks are so clean!"

"Oh, I think this is dead slow," came from Hockley. "This place isn't a bit more interesting than a dozen we passed through in Nicaragua."

Hockley was suffering from one of his sour moods—those which had brought for him his nicknames of Jake the Glum or Glummy. So far, since the burying of the hatchet on shipboard, he had remained fairly friendly, but there were strong evidences of a rupture in the near future.

"It suits me," put in Sam. "I find every new sight different from the old. Now, look at that shop over the way, for instance. Did you ever see such a queer-shaped doorway? And look at the goods for sale—what bright colors, and what funny-shaped riding-boots and riding-saddles! I thought the native wooden saddles in Nicaragua odd, but these are more so."

Hockley gave a yawn. "There is no excitement. Now, if a fellow could go to a theater, or a variety show, or a bullfight, or something like that, it would be different. Why, I don't know but that I'd like to get into one of the revolutions they have down here every few months or so."

"I reckon our adventure with Manuel Nonti and Ramon Malaya was exciting enough," said Mark

dryly. "I think you found it too exciting," he added, without stopping to think twice.

Now, Hockley had heard Mark and the others talking about that affair, and they had mentioned how he had asked Professor Strong to take them on the coastwise steamer, that they might avoid Ramon Malaya. The tall youth felt that they considered he had acted the coward, and consequently Mark's words were very much like touching a match to a train of gunpowder.

"See here, you needn't throw that up to me!" cried Hockley, with a darkening face. "You were just as willing to get out of Malaya's way as I was."

"I didn't say a word about that, Jake."

"No; but I know what you were thinking about."

"Indeed! Then you must be a mind-reader."

"Oh, come! don't quarrel about it!" put in Sam in alarm.

"I'm not quarreling," answered Mark coolly.

"You think you are braver than I," went on Hockley recklessly. "But I want you to know that I am no more of a coward than any one of you. The first fellow who says I am will get hit, and hit good and hard," and he doubled up his fists.

"Why, Jake, I thought we had buried the hatchet," said Darry.

"Humph! I knew how long that would last. You are all against me, just as you've been since the start," and he threw back his head in contempt.

"I am not against you," said Sam.

"Nor am I," added Frank.

"It is easy enough to talk, but to believe what you say is different," said Hockley, working himself into a rage. "You are all willing to be friends as long as I'll knuckle under to you."

"Who asked you to knuckle under? I didn't," came sharply from Mark. He himself was in no happy frame of mind that day, for he had dropped and broken three of his choicest photographic plates.

"You can go your own way if you want to," added Darry.

"I will, and you can keep your distance," retorted Hockley; and without another word he turned on his heel and walked off.

"Well, of all things!" came from Sam. "And after I had imagined our quarrels were at an end."

"You needn't blame me, Sam," came quickly from Mark. "It's only Hockley's pig-headedness."

"But you snapped him up so quickly——"

"It was bound to come sooner or later. He's been itching for it ever since we left San Juan What-do-you-call-it."

"Mark is right," came from Darry before Sam could speak. "Burying the hatchet was a farce—not but that you meant well enough, Sam," he hastily added.

"Well, I agree with Sam that it's a pity we can't get along," said Frank, with something like a sigh.

"Oh, you two fellows are perfect saints all at once!" retorted Mark. He, too, was beginning to lose his temper.

"Well, if that's the way you are going to look at it, I won't say another word," retorted Frank. He turned to Sam. "Come on, Sam; we might as well be moving on."

He caught Sam by the arm, and, after some hesitation, the boy from Boston went on with him. Darry started to speak, but suddenly shut his lips tightly, and remained silent. Fully two blocks were passed without anybody saying a word. Hockley had meanwhile disappeared, and now the boys found themselves back at the hotel.

It was not long before Professor Strong noticed

that something was wrong. Hardly a word was spoken by anybody, Hockley only opening his lips to address the tutor. Mark looked cross, and Frank was equally so.

"It looks to me as if there was a storm coming," remarked Amos Strong, when, for dessert, some juicy and sweet cantaloupes were brought in.

"Yes, sir," said Frank absent-mindedly.

"It is going to be rather severe, I am afraid," went on the professor.

"Shouldn't wonder," came from Mark.

"Do they ever have earthquakes here?" asked Hockley innocently.

This was too much for Darry, and he roared outright, nearly choking on the cantaloupe in his mouth. Hockley looked at him sourly.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," he observed.

"Of course you don't, Glu—Jake."

"Perhaps you know all about earthquakes," added the tall youth sarcastically.

"I know about some."

"They have earthquakes here, Jacob; but not one in recent years has been severe," answered Amos Strong, after clearing his throat several times.

This ended the talk, but it made Hockley more an-

gry than before, and Frank and Mark were also put out. Sam was troubled, thinking all his work of reconciliation had gone for naught; and Darry planned for more fun with Hockley at the first opportunity.

"We will take a train from here to San José, stopping for a few hours at Heredia," said Professor Strong. "The train leaves here at eight o'clock in the morning."

The night was a quiet one for the boys, enlivened only by the songs of several native minstrels, who came to the hotel and played and sang out on the lawn. The songs were catchy native airs, and more than one listener would join in ere the finish was reached. Hockley turned in early, and Mark and Frank soon followed his example.

"Tell you what, Sam, I think an earthquake is at hand," said Darry, when the two were alone.

"Darry, it's no laughing matter. I hoped that all would run along smoothly after this."

"So did I, Sam; but I knew it wasn't likely. Hockley——"

"But it wasn't all Jake's fault."

"Perhaps not; but it was mostly his fault."

"Well, it's too bad!" and Sam sighed long and

deep. He concluded that he was a poor peacemaker, after all.

But the earthquake did not come at once. In the morning all the boys felt better, and Mark and Frank went around whistling cheerfully, while Hockley hummed a tune to himself.

The start for San José, the capital, was made on time. The train was better than the boys had anticipated, and ran smoothly, up grade and down, and over several pretty bridges spanning deep ravines and glittering watercourses. In the distance could be seen the Barba Mountains. The air was warm, but clear and pure, so that they suffered but little discomfort. Soon they came in sight of Heredia, which is located between the rivers Pirro and Quebrada, a city about as large as that left behind.

Alighting, Amos Strong hired a comfortable conveyance to take them around the town and out on one of the numerous country roads, where they visited a sugar factory, a coffee-curing establishment, and a banana plantation. At the latter place the proprietor was getting ready to send out a small steamer load of bananas and plantains, the load to go on the railroad to Limon, and from that seaport direct to New York City.

"How long will it take to reach New York?" asked Mark.

"Eight or nine days."

"That isn't so bad. Our folks can be eating these bananas in less than two weeks from now."

"Yes; and the push-cart man will have them for sale, and go shouting out: 'Gooda de banan! Buya de banan!'" said Darry, and a short laugh went up.

"America isn't so very large, after all, when you come to think of it," said Frank.

By train time they were at the depot, and soon the cars came in and they piled on board. Then came another run, around hills and over deep ravines, and in a few moments more they found themselves in San José, the capital of Costa Rica, and by far its most interesting city.

CHAPTER XXIV

A DOUBLE SETBACK FOR HOCKLEY

"THIS is quite a busy little city."

Such was Frank's remark, on the following morning, as he and Mark took a stroll out.

"It is Saturday, and the professor tells me this is market day in most Central American towns," returned Mark. "All the country people come in with their produce. They sell mostly for cash, and then spend the money at the shops."

A little later Amos Strong took them down to the San José market, a well-built and clean building. They had difficulty in getting to it, for the narrow streets were blocked with mule teams, ox-carts, and vehicles which were strange to them.

The market people were of all sorts—Spanish, negroes, and Indians, with here and there a European. Of Americans they saw none, excepting at the hotel, and at the Protestant church, a small Gothic structure, set in a garden of tropical trees and ever-blooming rose bushes.

"This Protestant church is well worth visiting," said Amos Strong. "It is not remarkable in itself, but it is said to be the first church not Roman Catholic ever erected in a Central American republic."

Having visited the market and the church, they inspected the National, Presidential, and Bishop's palaces (all large buildings here are palaces), and the Palace of Justice. Then came the National University, with its public library of four thousand volumes, and the elegant Cathedral. Here a number of choir boys were practicing, and they listened to their sweet voices and the deep-toned organ.

"They have big names here," remarked Darry. "Just think of how many palaces we have visited!"

"Fine names are very pleasing to the people of warm climates," answered Amos Strong. "In the Orient they are as common as here. Look at the shops yonder. That jeweler's place is called The Cave of Diamonds; the saloon, The Haven of Repose; the bakery, The Pure Delight, and so on to the end of the block. Even the hackman on the corner calls his turnout The Carriage of Ease. It is a style that has been handed down for generations, and it will be long before it disappears."

Our friends had put up at a hotel which catered almost exclusively to American and European trade. Here the overpowering smell of onions, garlic, and oil, which had greeted them almost everywhere in Nicaragua, was missing, much to their satisfaction.

“And, better yet, water is plentiful, and they have a real, genuine bathroom,” said Sam. In many places it had been difficult to get a large supply of water for washing purposes, and bathtubs were comparatively unknown.

After the traveling of the past weeks, the boys were glad to rest in San José for four or five days. On Sunday they attended services in the Protestant Church, heard two excellent sermons, and were introduced to the minister, who was glad to meet the young travelers, and who talked to them and to Amos Strong for the better part of an hour. At half-past four in the afternoon they went down to the Public Park, and heard a concert given by a military band of no mean ability.

“This is something like,” remarked Hockley, when the concert was over. “I’d like more music.” He had gone to church with the rest, but had thought the sermon very dry.

While at the hotel Hockley made inquiries and learned that there were two theaters in San José, one where fairly good dramas and light operas were occasionally performed and another which was given over to vaudeville by Spanish and Mexican artists. The better-class playhouse was shut up, but the other, he was told, was open every night in the week, including Sunday.

"There is a singer there, a Mexican girl named Migrette, who is a perfect fairy," said the man who gave the tall youth the news. "You must see her and listen to her by all means."

Hockley knew it would be useless to ask the professor if he could go. The showbills were of such a low order Amos Strong would surely not approve of the exhibition. And Hockley was equally certain it would not do to ask any of the other boys to go with him.

"I'll watch my chance and go alone," he told himself.

He was informed that he had better get a seat in advance, and so one morning walked down to the theater, on a side street, and got the necessary ticket at the office.

As he came out he ran full into Mark, who had

been out hunting for a certain size of photographic plates, which, however, could not be found in San José.

"Hullo, Jake, where have you been?" said Mark, pleasantly, in an endeavor to smooth over the late unpleasantness.

"Nowhere," was the abrupt answer. And then Hockley continued hastily: "I just went in the hallway to look at the pictures."

"I see. It must be a low kind of a show, eh?"

"Perhaps not."

"You can wager it is—with such bills up. I shouldn't care to go to it."

After this there was silence, and soon the pair separated, Hockley returning to the hotel and Mark continuing his search for the plates.

That evening about eight o'clock, Mark and Frank were just preparing to go out when Hockley burst into the room they occupied, his face red with anger.

"You sneak, you!" he roared, striding up to Mark, and doubling up his fist. "You miserable sneak! I've a good mind to knock you down!"

His manner was so threatening that Mark put up

his arms to ward off a possible blow, while his face was filled with amazement.

"What's the matter with you, Jake?" he questioned.

"You know well enough, you sneak."

"I am no sneak."

"Yes, you are—a low, vile sneak, and——"

"Stop, I tell you." Mark's face grew white. "You've got to take back those words, or I'll make you."

"I won't take them back, for they are true. I'll fix you. Take that!"

Without more ado Hockley aimed a savage blow at Mark's head, which, if it had landed, would have done considerable damage. But Mark ducked, and the fist passed over his shoulder. Then Mark swung around, and instantly Hockley received a blow in the ear that sent him reeling against the end of a bedstead.

"Here, this won't do," put in Frank, in alarm. "Don't fight in the hotel. The proprietor will have us all arrested."

"I didn't start the fight," said Mark.

"I don't care what the proprietor does—I'm going to have satisfaction," roared Hockley, as

angry as a mad bull over the blow he had received. "He's a sneak, and you're no better, if you stick up for him."

The loud talking and the scuffle attracted the attention of Sam and Darry, who were in the room adjoining. They came running in, wanting to know what it all meant.

"I'll tell you, after I am through with this sneak," howled Hockley, and attacked Mark once more.

On the instant the "mix-up" became a lively one, as blows were given and taken freely. The boys moved from one end of the room to the other, and a chair and a small table were upset, throwing some books and other things to the floor. Mark was struck in the shoulder and on the cheek, while Hockley received another blow on the ear and two in the eye which almost blinded him.

"This won't do—it simply won't do!" cried Sam, in a low voice. "What if Professor Strong should come in? If you must fight, do it elsewhere," and he tried to crowd in between the pair.

Frank and Darry did the same, and just as Mark got in another blow, one that made Hockley's nose bleed, the two contestants were separated, Frank

holding his New York chum, and Sam and Darry holding the bully.

"Let me get at him," roared Hockley, still struggling. "I'll show him what I can do to a sneak."

"Now just quiet down and explain," said Sam.

"He understands without an explanation," roared Hockley.

"I am sure I don't know what he means by my playing the sneak," panted Mark.

"You went to Professor Strong and blabbed on me."

"About what?"

"You know well enough."

"I haven't told the professor anything about you —haven't even mentioned your name," retorted Mark.

"I know better. You saw me come out of the theater——" Hockley stopped short. He did not want the others to know that he had tried to visit the playhouse on the sly.

"Did you see Hockley at the theater?" asked Sam, in wonder.

"I saw him come away from the ticket office of

the variety theater this morning. But I didn't pay much attention to it, and I never mentioned it to the professor."

"Did the professor stop your going?" asked Frank.

"Yes, he did. I was just going in when he came walking along and told me it was no fit place for me. He acted just as if somebody had sent him there, and nobody knew about it but Mark."

"That doesn't prove that he told the professor," said Sam.

"It does to me."

"As I said before, I never mentioned the matter," came from Mark warmly. "You needn't believe me, Hockley, but it is true, nevertheless."

"Did you tell anybody else you were going?" asked Sam.

"Nobody but the hotel clerk. He said he might go along, if he could get off."

"Then he is the man who told the professor," exclaimed Darry. "For I saw the two talking together just before dinner, and as I passed I heard the clerk mention the word theater."

"I don't believe he said anything," muttered Hockley, but his face became a study. "I'll find

out before I go to bed." And without another word he turned and left the room.

Smarting painfully from the blows he had received, he washed and brushed up and then went to the office of the hotel. Here the clerk greeted him with a bland smile.

"I thought you were going to the theater," he said, in Spanish accent.

"I—I changed my mind," stammered Hockley. "By the by," he went on; "did you mention the matter to Professor Strong?"

"Oh, yes. He was asking me about the various points of interest, and I told him of the theater and said that you and I had expected to go there together."

"Thank you for your extreme kindness," said Hockley, with a sarcasm which was entirely lost on the clerk, and then, with a heart full of conflicting emotions, he returned to his own room.

CHAPTER XXV

FROM SAN JOSÉ TO LIMON

"HOCKLEY has gotten himself into trouble again," said Sam, when the tall youth had departed.

"He had no right to pitch into me," said Mark. "Why didn't you fellows let us alone? I am sure I could have polished him off in short order."

"We don't doubt it," came from Frank. "But it won't do to fight in the hotel."

The matter was talked over for fully an hour, and all became convinced that the bully would soon learn of his error.

"He ought to come back and apologize to Mark," said Darry.

"You'll not catch Glummy apologizing," cried Frank. "He'd rather cut off his tongue than acknowledge himself in the wrong."

And so it proved—at least for the time being. On the following day Hockley did not appear for his breakfast until after the others had eaten, and when he did join the crowd he had next to nothing to say.

It was decided to take the train from San José to Limon, on the Atlantic coast, with a short stop-over at Cartago. The distance to the latter point from the capital is but thirteen miles, so the ride was a short one. Arriving in Cartago they spent an hour in visiting the various points of interest, including four large churches and the College of San Luis.

"Cartago was the capital of Costa Rica up to 1823," said the professor. "In 1841 it was completely destroyed by an earthquake, so that what you see is really a new city. The industries are not many. A large number of the richest people of the republic live here."

"And that is why there are so many beggars," said Sam. "We've been here just an hour, and already five beggars have asked me for alms."

"The town is very healthy, being located five thousand feet above sea-level. The peak you see back of the place is the Volcano Irazu, which has been inactive for a number of years."

"Well, I hope it remains inactive—at least until we leave Costa Rica," said Frank.

Soon the train came along and they got aboard. The route now led down the hills to a broad plain covered with virgin forests and banana plantations.

There were several deep streams to cross, and at one point they saw a large sawmill, which, a fellow passenger told them, had just been erected by American capitalists.

“When Americans realize the resources of this country, capital will come in quickly,” said the man who gave this information. “There is a fortune in lumber alone,” and Hockley said he felt certain this was true.

Just before reaching the seacoast the tracks ran over a wide swamp, which, they were told, it had cost many thousands of dollars to fill in. Beyond was a coral bank, and soon they sighted Limon, with its white-roofed houses, skirting the sparkling Atlantic. The railroad tracks ran directly out upon a long pier, at which the largest freight steamers can load and unload, but they alighted at the station in the town proper.

None of the boys had received letters from home since leaving Granada, and as they had given Limon as one of their future addresses all were anxious to get to the post-office for mail.

“Hurrah, letters for all of us!” cried Darry, when the professor came forth with the bunch. And so it proved, and soon they were sitting around read-

ing the various communications. Fortunately there was no bad news for anybody, for which they were thankful.

"My folks want me to thank you for the pictures you gave me," said Darry to Mark. "They think that of all of us on muleback too funny for anything."

"My mother is pleased with the pictures, too." came from Sam. "She especially liked that of the rapids at Castillo."

While this talk was going on, Hockley's face was a study. So far he had scarcely spoken to Mark since the "affair" in the hotel room at San José. Mark had taken for his benefit pictures of two sawmills, one on the San Juan and one near Managua, and these the tall youth had sent home to his father. The old lumber merchant had been pleased, and his letter contained half a page on the subject. Hockley had written that "we" had taken the pictures, not Mark alone, and the lumber merchant now wrote back that he hoped his son would continue to take snapshots of all sawmills and lumber camps he ran across, so the family could get together a collection which might be framed to hang in the main offices of the lumber company of which he was president.

"Anything about pictures in yours, Frank?" asked Sam.

"I haven't found anything yet, but—— Yes, here it is: 'Pictures received, and we are going to have that of the boat on Lake Nicaragua and of the camp on the San Juan River enlarged. Give Mark our thanks, and tell him if he wants to go into the photographic business when he returns home we will give him a recommendation for first-class work.'"

"Thanks!" cried Mark, and taking off his cap he made a bow. "I'll hang out my sign on Broadway. 'Mark Robertson, Photoist. Tintypes taken by the dozen or gross, as you please.'"

"And add another sign reading, 'Sittings given while you wait,'"

came from Darry, and a laugh went up.

"Puts me in mind of a sign I once saw in Fall River: 'Soled shoes sold here. Say it quickly, and don't forget the number—1, nothing, 6,'"

and another laugh followed. "That was a queer sign, but, just the same, I shan't forget that number, 106, as long as I live."

Limon is only a small place, and they had some difficulty in finding a suitable boarding house. Most

of the houses were of one story, with either tiled or galvanized iron roofs. The majority were white, but, as in other towns they had visited, a few were yellow, blue, pink, and other startling shades.

One of the most interesting sights was to see a train load of bananas stowed away on a freight steamer bound for New Orleans, New York, or some other port. The train was backed up on the long dock until it stood within ten feet of the steamer's side, and then dozens of negro workmen and others passes the bunches of bananas from car to hold, where they were packed away in grass. Not infrequently a snake or a tarantula would be brought into view, and then there would be a lively time to kill the creature.

It had been decided that the party should move from Limon directly to Colon, on the Isthmus of Panama, providing accommodations could be found on a steamer sailing for that port.

It was no easy matter to find a vessel bound south, but on the third day in the town an old Spanish boat, the *Buena Vista*, came in for some provisions. She was bound for Colon and other Colombian ports, and the captain, an old fellow who had sailed the Caribbean for fifty years, volunteered to take them as passengers for ten dollars each, in gold.

The *Buena Vista*, he said, would make the distance, about 230 miles, in three days.

"I can't say that I care for the looks of that old tub," said Sam. "But I guess we can stand it for three days."

"There will be a better boat along in eight days," said Amos Strong. "We can wait for that if you wish."

"Oh, no, let's push on!" cried Frank; and so it was agreed.

But the boys changed their minds after they had been on the *Buena Vista* a single day. The state-rooms were small, stuffy, and ill ventilated, while the table that was set was so bad that they could scarcely touch the food.

"This is worse than what we got when we sailed with Captain Sudlip, from La Guayra to Havana," observed Mark.

"I will make a complaint at once," said Amos Strong, and he did so.

"Señor, I am giving you the best my noble ship affords," said Captain Romadorian. "I see no cause for complaint."

"We must have something better," said the professor firmly. "If it is not forthcoming I shall complain to the authorities at Colon."

"You shall have the best, señor," and the captain of the *Buena Vista* bowed in a stately fashion. He was a decidedly queer man, and the boys came to the conclusion that he had a "screw loose in his upper story," as Darry expressed it. The next meal was better, but left a wide margin for further improvement.

On the first evening out the boys had noticed that the donkey engine used for pumping water from the hold was in constant use. The following morning the engine was still working, more energetically than ever. They were now far out at sea, and the *Buena Vista* rolled heavily in the waves of the Atlantic.

"She's a tub and no mistake," said Frank. "To me she doesn't appear to be making any progress whatever."

"At this rate it is certainly going to take us more than three days to reach Colon," put in Mark.

They saw that Amos Strong was greatly disturbed. His face was grave, and more than once he went below to consult with the captain and some of the other officers.

"What's the professor up to?" questioned Hockley at last. "He has been down in the hold and his feet are wet."



"Another leak, *Capitan*," he cried. — Page 241.

They followed the tutor and saw him hold another talk with the captain. The latter shook his head, but Amos Strong was very emphatic.

"I know my ship too well, señor," the boys heard Captain Romadorian say. "There is no danger. We are pumping out the water as fast as it comes in."

"But they told me in the hold that it has gained three inches in the last two hours," insisted Amos Strong.

"The ship's carpenter will attend to the leaks, señor. There is not the slightest danger."

"But, sir——"

"I am captain here, señor, and I will not be dictated to by anyone, least of all by a Yankee."

"But the danger——"

The Spanish captain shrugged his shoulders.

"So long as I am not afraid you need not be, señor. The boat is perfectly safe. We shall reach Colon on time, and——"

At that moment one of the crew came running forward.

"Another leak, *capitan!*" he cried in Spanish. "The water is rushing in like a fountain! It is two inches above the danger mark! What shall we do?"

CHAPTER XXVI

AN EXCITING TIME ON SHIPBOARD

ALL of the boys heard the excited statements of the sailor, and Hockley gave a wild cry of alarm.

“I knew it! The steamer is sinking! We shall all go to the bottom!”

Professor Strong had not noticed the proximity of the boys, and he turned with surprise.

“Do not be alarmed so soon, Jacob,” he said reassuringly.

“But we are going down! I heard the sailor say so!” persisted the lank youth. He had understood only a little of the Spanish and had guessed at the rest.

“The ship is suffering from several bad leaks, it is true, but——”

“We’ll go down, I know we shall,” interrupted Hockley. His face was growing paler each instant.

By this time Captain Romadorian had departed, accompanied by the sailor who had brought the news of a new leak.

Soon the pumps were heard, working more energetically than ever. A line of hose was also stretched from the hold to the rail and two sailors were set at work pumping by hand.

For the time being the extra pumping seemed to keep the water down to the level previously announced.

"This is going to be a serious affair," said Mark to Frank.

"I am glad it is a clear day. It would be awful if a storm came up," answered Frank.

"It will be bad enough as it is—if we have to leave the ship," came from Sam. "I've been looking at the small boats. Every one of them is as rotten as the ship."

"If the boat sinks, what shall we do?" chattered Hockley. "We can't swim to any place. We are miles and miles from land."

"You wouldn't swim very far here, anyway," put in Darry. "Don't forget that these waters are full of sharks."

The Loys wanted to talk the matter over with Professor Strong, but the tutor had gone down in the hold again. He had donned a rough hunting

suit, and he was aiding the ship's carpenter to patch up one of the worst of the leaks.

When the professor returned to the deck he was a sight to behold, being covered with water, slime, and mud. But he had given the carpenter valuable assistance, and the two, aided by two sailors, had fastened a rubber blanket over a large leak and piled some heavy boxes against it.

"That will hold for some time," he said, "and the water is now coming in no faster than they are able to pump it out. Still, I will not attempt to disguise the fact that the situation is a serious one."

"The captain should turn back to the coast, shouldn't he?" questioned Mark.

"He is a decidedly peculiar man, Mark. If the leaks get worse he will have to do something. The carpenter told me that the steamer leaked when she came into Limon, and should never have left that port without repairs. That being the case, Captain Romadorian could be held criminally liable for the sinking of the *Buena Vista*."

"But that wouldn't give us back our lives if we were drowned," came dolefully from Hockley.

"Well, if we were drowned we shouldn't have much to say about it," put in Darry, who was bound

to joke, no matter how serious the outlook. But nobody laughed.

They talked the matter over for half an hour, but with small satisfaction. Professor Strong advised that they pack up the few belongings they had scattered in their staterooms.

"We may wish to leave the *Buena Vista* in a hurry, even if she doesn't sink," he said.

"In one of the small boats?" asked Sam.

"Hardly that. We are in the track now of a number of steamships bound for Colon. If by any means we can make a transfer I shall do it."

"That's the talk!" cried Hockley, his face brightening. "Let us leave this old tub by all means."

After that all of the boys kept their eyes open for a strange sail. Luckily the day continued clear, although a stiff wind was blowing and this increased during the afternoon. The wind caused the *Buena Vista* to roll once more, and at two o'clock it was announced that the water in the hold was once more gaining.

So far only a small sail to the northward had been seen. But now the boys, who had Hockley's spy-glass,—the one the crowd had first used in seeing the sights from the Statue of Liberty in New York

harbor,—discovered a thin trail of smoke to the northeastward.

"It is coming this way, too," declared Sam, after a long look.

The announcement proved correct, and in half an hour they made out the smokestacks and hull of one of the regular-line steamers plying between Colon and several United States ports.

Without delay Professor Strong sought out the captain of the *Buena Vista* once more.

"A large steamer is approaching," he said, "and if the captain will take us, I want our party transferred."

Captain Romadorian shrugged his shoulders.

"It cannot be done, señor," he said.

"It must be done," answered Amos Strong sharply.

A long and bitter argument followed. But the professor was as stubborn as the Spanish captain, and threatened all sorts of things upon the arrival at Colon. At last Captain Romadorian agreed to signal the coming steamer, and this was presently done.

It must be confessed that Captain Jackson of the *Aspinwall* was greatly astonished when he under-

stood the situation. At first he demurred slightly at taking the six extra passengers, but Amos Strong won him over, and a long boat was sent out and near to the *Buena Vista's* side. The transfer was made by means of a yard and sling, and was by no means easy, but in the end all hands and the baggage were safely aboard the liner.

"I'm glad to get away from the *Buena Vista*," remarked Sam. "I never want to see such a tub again."

"She'll be lucky if she doesn't go down," said Mark. But it may be added here that the *Buena Vista* did not go down. Yet she became waterlogged, and two days later another steamer, bound for Limon, threw her a cable and towed her back to that port.

Accommodations were very much crowded on the *Aspinwall*, for there was a party of tourists on board, bound for California by way of the Isthmus of Panama. The boys did not complain, even though they had to "bunk" in one stateroom "four deep," as Darry put it. Hockley occupied a tiny stateroom with the professor.

"The Isthmus of Panama became very popular as a route to California during the gold excitement of

1849," said the professor. "Thousands who did not wish to attempt the journey overland or around Cape Horn went by way of the Isthmus. In those days there was no railroad, and they made the trip partly in small boats on the rivers and partly on foot or on muleback."

"I understand that the building of the railroad across the Isthmus was a great undertaking," came from Mark.

"It was a great undertaking, Mark, and though the road is only about fifty miles long it cost over seven million dollars to build and took five years of hard work to complete. At that time, in 1850, the Isthmus was a howling wilderness, swampy in some spots and full of trees, bushes, and vines in others. The civil engineers had often to work up to their waists in mud and slime to lay out the route. The climate, never very good, was then unusually unhealthy, and hundreds of workers died from fever and malaria and other ailments. In some of the swamps no substantial bottom could be found, and these spots had to be 'floated over,' as they call it, by filling in with timber, brushwood, and earth."

"Is the Isthmus of Panama in Central America or South America?" questioned Hockley.

“Theoretically, the Isthmus, being in Colombia, which is a South American republic, is in South America. But if you will look at a large map of North, Central, and South America, you will see that, geographically, the portion north of the railroad belongs to Central America, while that south of the railroad belongs to South America. The railroad, and the proposed canal, which are close together, make an excellent division mark.”

“The Panama Canal wasn’t started until long after the railroad was built, was it?” questioned Darry.

“The canal was actually started in 1881, although numerous surveys were made previous to that time. It was a French undertaking, headed by Ferdinand de Lesseps, an engineer who had been instrumental in pushing to completion the celebrated Suez Canal, which has done so much for the commerce of Europe, Asia, and Africa. De Lesseps was very enthusiastic, and felt certain at first that the canal could be built inside of five years, at a total cost of a hundred and twenty millions of dollars.”

“A hundred and twenty millions!” cried Frank.
“What an enormous sum!”

“The first estimate was nearly fifty millions more

than that. But De Lesseps reduced it so that the bonds of the company could more easily be sold. But every year the estimate had to be increased, and the time of the opening of the canal had to be put off. Work on the canal was continued until 1889, when the company, having spent about two hundred and sixty millions of dollars, went into liquidation."

"And is the canal anywhere near complete?" asked Frank.

"Far from it. The canal was to be fifty-four miles long; and of this length only twelve miles are complete and navigable. The completed portion is where the ground is low. Up in the mountains,—the backbone of the Isthmus,—where the cut was to be several hundred feet deep and V-shaped, which meant a very large opening at the top, practically nothing has been accomplished."

"Why, it will take an enormous sum to complete that canal," said Sam. "If Uncle Sam takes hold it will bankrupt the country."

"Not quite as bad as that, Samuel, although it will cost a great deal. You see, a good deal of the French capital was wasted on high salaries and on pushing the scheme in a manner that was hardly legal. Besides this, we have now machinery to do

this work which is a great improvement on the machinery of twenty years ago."

"I think I favor the Nicaragua route," said Mark.

"Well, it is hard to say which is the better. Each has its advantages and its disadvantages. I believe Congress and President Roosevelt will weigh the matter carefully, and if anything is done, the conclusion will be about correct."

CHAPTER XXVII

A FIGHT AND ITS RESULT

THE town of Colon, often called Aspinwall, after the principal promoter of the Panama Railroad, is located on the small island of Manzanilla, close to the shore of the Isthmus, to which it is attached by the embankment of the railroad. It fronts on Limon Bay and is scarcely three feet above sea-level.

The town was founded by William H. Aspinwall in 1855. It was then a decidedly unhealthy place, with many houses on stilts, to keep the high tides from washing the floors. Twenty years later it was burned by the revolutionists who overran the country. But better houses and churches took the place of those destroyed, until, to-day, Colon will compare favorably with any South American community of equal size.

“The population is about three thousand,” said the professor, when the steamer reached port. “The better class of people live on the sea side of the island. The little rise of ground you see beyond the

island is Monkey Hill, sometimes called Mount Hope. The cemetery is located there."

The scene at the water front was a lively one, and soon the docks were crowded with the tourists bound for California. Not a great distance away was the railroad station, and to this the tourists made their way, for they were to go directly through to Panama, at the other end of the railroad line.

"Ordinarily speaking, this railroad doesn't amount to much," said Amos Strong; "yet the travel here is quite large, and the road pays a big dividend to its stockholders. The only place of importance along the route is Gorgona, located about midway between Colon and Panama."

The scene along the main street, where were located the piers of the various steamship companies, was as interesting as anything the boys had yet seen. Here were ships from nearly every quarter of the globe, either discharging or taking on cargoes. The negroes at work droned out a lazy tune, as they moved on and off the vessels, and half a dozen different languages greeted the ear in as many minutes.

"This is as cosmopolitan as New York City," remarked Frank. "Makes a fellow think of the docks down on the East Side."

They had decided to remain in Colon for a couple of days, and, after looking after their baggage, entered a large stage, which stood ready to take passengers to the leading hotel.

"During the days when the work on the canal was in progress Colon was a very busy place," said Amos Strong, as they drove along the main street. "Money was plentiful, and everything 'went,' as you boys say. But now matters have taken a quieter turn."

The lads found the hotel small, but comfortable. Dinner was waiting for them, but they were cautioned to eat sparingly, and to drink no more water than was necessary.

"You cannot be too temperate in all things while down on the Isthmus," cautioned the professor. "He who eats and drinks what he pleases will soon find himself the victim of some disease. I am particularly glad that you do not touch liquor. It is one of the worst possible things to use in such a climate as this. In the beginning it braces one up, but after that it weakens greatly."

"If I thought I'd get yellow fever, I'd get out in short order," said Darry.

"Gracious! Don't mention yellow fever!" ejac-

ulated Hockley. "If there is any of that around, I'm going at once."

"I think you'll be safe for the time we spend here, if you take care of yourself, Jacob," answered the professor reassuringly.

After the meal they took a walk out in the cool of the evening—which was not saying much, considering that the thermometer still registered ninety-five degrees. There was a small set of public buildings, including two pretty churches, and a tiny park, where is located a statue to the memory of the three men who had the most to do with the railroad. Then they made a journey down to the beach, which was soon flooded with the silver sheen of the full moon. Here they remained until it was time to retire.

The next day Amos Strong had some money matters that needed his personal attention, so he left the boys to shift for themselves.

"Go where you please, only keep out of mischief," was his caution on departing.

"I'd like to have a carriage ride, or go out on horseback," said Darry.

"Yes, let us make it a carriage ride!" cried Frank enthusiastically. "We'll get some driver who knows the vicinity well, so he can take us to the best places.

Mark can take some snapshots, and perhaps I can pick up some ferns or plants to send home."

All were willing but Hockley. Yet the tall youth did not wish to remain behind alone, and so accompanied them, although not without grumbling. They took a train to Monkey Hill, and here a big carryall was discovered, and into this they piled, with a Colombian who could speak a little English to drive them.

The drives beyond the hill are not many, yet one or two roads are quite pretty, and soon they were bowling along, with Darry sitting beside the driver and handling the reins in a manner that made the Colombian grin.

"*Americano* boy know him horses," said the native. "Drive so good like anybody."

"Yes, if I don't put you into a ditch," answered Darry. He noticed that the road was exceedingly swampy in spots. Mangroves were there in plenty, with wild plantains and other fruit. It was not long before the jungle became so thick that the road was almost blocked.

"I heard something queer about the railroad while at the hotel," remarked Sam on the way. "They have to keep men constantly employed cutting the

vines and bushes. If they don't, the growth will in many places overrun the very roadbed."

A drive of two hours brought them to a hill where were located a dozen houses of more or less pretension. Here the boys alighted, to explore a bit on foot, and to take it easy before returning to town.

"Here is a sight for you!" suddenly shouted Sam, who had wandered down to the high bank of a pond not far away. "Mark, bring your camera."

When the others arrived at the spot, they discovered two large alligators resting on the bank on the other side of the pond. But before Mark could get his camera ready for use the alligators slid out of sight with a splash.

"What big fellows they were!" ejaculated Darry. "I shouldn't want to fall into that pond."

"Nor I," added Frank, with a shake of his head. "That biggest fellow wouldn't make more than two mouthfuls of you."

"Oh, pshaw! Mark could have had a picture had he been quick enough," put in Hockley.

"I was as quick as possible," retorted Mark. "I had to fix the plate, and——"

"You always were slow," sneered the lank youth. It was clear to see that he was in one of his sour

moods. He had hardly spoken to Mark for two days. He had not forgotten the quarrel in the hotel at San José, and the fact that he had wrongly accused his companion appeared to carry no weight with him.

"Perhaps I am not so slow as you think, Glummy," retorted Mark, his face flushing.

"Oh, let it pass!" interposed Sam. "We are out here to have a good time, and——"

"Are you throwing up that quarrel at the hotel?" demanded Hockley, stepping up with clenched fists. "If you are, let me say that I am ready for you any time you choose."

"Didn't you get enough then?"

"Humph! I suppose you think you had the best of it, don't you? Well, let me tell you that I could have polished you off in another five minutes."

"Nothing of the sort," interposed Frank. "Mark had the best of it from the start. But if you——"

"If he isn't a coward, he will meet me again, and now!" howled Hockley, in a sudden rage.

"All right; I'll meet you right now," retorted Mark, and turned to Frank. "Take this camera and my coat."

"Mark, don't you think——" began Sam.

"Now, shut up, Beans!" interrupted Hockley. "If he will meet me, that is our affair. I don't suppose any of you want to hold my coat, so I'll throw it on the grass." And he did so.

In less than a minute more the two boys were facing each other. Mark had the better of the encounter from the start, for he was somewhat cool and collected, while Hockley was boiling over with anger long suppressed.

The tall youth struck out twice in quick succession, and Mark dodged both blows. Then he let drive himself, taking the bully in the chest. After that came a clinch, and the boys moved from one spot to another, each trying to get the advantage.

"Break away, Mark!" cried Frank, who was afraid that his chum might be unequal to the other at close quarters.

But Hockley clung on, hitting Mark a vicious blow in the stomach. Then they parted, and in a flash Mark struck out and caught the bully on the nose. Like the blow delivered at the hotel, this drew blood, making the lank youth madder than ever.

"I'll fix you for that!" he roared, and aimed a blow for Mark's head which, if it had landed, would have knocked him senseless. But Mark jumped

aside, and the blow merely grazed his shoulder. Then Mark came on, "hammer and tongs," so quickly that Hockley was forced to give ground.

"Look out!" suddenly cried Darry, and leaped to one side, for he had been standing back of Hockley.

The words were just uttered, when Mark struck out once more, hitting the bully fairly and squarely on the chin. It was a telling blow, and sent Hockley's head backward. To save himself from falling, the bully took several steps to the rear.

He had been close to the pond, and Darry's warning was meant for his benefit. But it was too late to do any good. On the bank Hockley slipped; then followed a splash, and in a moment more he disappeared beneath the muddy surface of the pond.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ESCAPE FROM THE ALLIGATORS

"My gracious, Hockley is overboard!" came from Darry.

"Quick! Help him out of the pond!" burst out Sam. "Remember the alligators!"

"The alligators!" came from several throats.

At this moment there was a splash at the farther end of the pond, and they caught a glimpse of an alligator's tail, as the animal swam forward.

"He's after Jake, as sure as you're born!" gasped Frank.

So far, Mark had not spoken. He knew the peril as well as anybody, and he felt in his heart that he was to blame for Hockley's present situation.

On the instant his anger at his disagreeable comrade vanished, and he thought only of how he might aid the unfortunate youth. He gazed into the muddy water. Hockley had not yet reappeared. What could be keeping him down?

Splash! To the surprise of the others, Mark had

leaped into the mud and water. The depth of the pond was probably eight feet at this point, and he, too, for a moment went out of sight. But then he came up, holding Hockley by the arm. The tall youth was unconscious.

The bank of the pond was steep and slippery, and the alligator was coming closer at an alarming rate of speed. Seeing this, Frank screamed:

“Jump for your lives! The 'gator is coming!”

Mark heard the warning, but could not jump, as he was supporting Hockley.

“Throw something at him! Fire off a pistol—anything!” he gasped.

Thinking it best to have a firearm of some kind along, Sam had brought a pistol. This he now produced, and, taking aim at the ripple in the water, fired. At the same time Darry and Frank let drive with stones they managed to secure.

Whether or not the alligator was struck, they could not tell. But the progress of the dreaded creature was stayed, as was also the progress of the second alligator, that had also begun to show signs of activity.

Standing upright, Mark pushed Hockley up the steep bank to a place of safety. Then he scam-

bled up himself, clutching the slippery dirt tenaciously. The danger was past, and he lay on the grass, panting for breath. The carriage driver came rushing from one of the houses to learn what the pistol shot meant.

"Did you get nipped?" asked Frank anxiously.

"No," was the short answer.

"And Hockley?"

"I don't know about him."

The others bent over the tall youth, and noticed that he was now gasping for breath. Presently he gave a gulp and opened his eyes in wonder.

"Who—what—how did I get out of the pond?" he asked at length.

"Mark jumped in, and threw you out," answered Darry.

"Jumped in after me?" came slowly from the bully.

"Yes."

"We were afraid the alligators would catch you," put in Sam. "They got pretty close, but I fired the pistol, and Frank and Darry threw stones, and that kept 'em off. If we hadn't done that, perhaps both of you would have been eaten up alive."

At these plain words Hockley began to tremble,

for the first sight of the creatures had caused him to shiver. He looked at Mark.

"Did you jump after me on purpose?" he questioned slowly.

"Yes, I did, Jake. I didn't want to see you bitten."

"You knocked me over the bank in the first place."

"I didn't think about the pond. I was excited."

"I see. But you knocked me out, just the same." And Hockley heaved a big sigh.

The driver of the carriage told them they could be thankful the alligators had not reached them.

"They get you, they eat you quick," he added, with a sickly grin. He did not give the fight consideration, thinking the boys had been fooling.

It was rather a silent crowd that drove back an hour later. The clothes of Hockley and Mark had been cleaned of mud, but were not dry. Yet, as it was so hot, this did no harm.

"I wonder what Hockley thinks of the whole thing?" said Sam that evening, when he and Frank and Darry were taking it easy on the hotel veranda.

"He ought to thank Mark for saving his life."

"More than likely he'll blame Mark for knocking

him into the pond," put in Frank. "I know Glummy like a book."

Just then Mark came up. He looked unusually cheerful.

"Well, boys, I have good news," he said, as he dropped into a hammock.

"What is it?"

"Hockley says he is going to bury the hatchet, and bury it so deep this time that it can't be unearthed."

"Good!" almost shouted Sam. "That is fine news," and he wrung Mark's hand. "How did you bring it about?"

"I didn't do it. Hockley thinks I did something wonderful when I jumped into the pond, that's all. Here he comes now." Mark lowered his voice. "Make it easy for him."

In a few seconds the tall youth came shuffling up, his face rather red. He looked from one to another hesitatingly.

"Here's a seat, Jake," came from Sam, who sat on one end of a wide settee.

"I suppose Mark has told you," said Hockley, and his voice trembled a trifle. He cleared his throat. "I was a fool to get mad again. But I got

to thinking you were all down on me. It was a mistake, and I found it out when Mark jumped after me into the pond where the alligators were, and you fellows fired the pistol and threw the stones. Now I've told him that I want to bury the hatchet——"

Hockley got no further, for Sam leaped up and took one hand, while Frank took the other.

"Let's consider it buried," said Frank; and Sam said the same. Darry also shook hands, and said he was willing to let the past take care of itself.

It was wonderful how relieved all of the party felt after that. They told stories and sang songs, and after a while Professor Strong joined them. He had felt that matters had reached a crisis, and he was as relieved as anyone to see that all had ended happily.

But he had news which disturbed them not a little.

"I was walking down near the railroad station a while ago," he said. "A train was just on the point of starting for Panama. As it began to move, a man rushed past me and got aboard. Who do you think it was?"

"A friend?" queried Sam during the pause that followed.

"No; an enemy."

"It must have been Ramon Malaya," came from Darry.

"It was."

"Did he speak to you?" asked Mark.

"No; in fact, I do not think he saw me. He was in a tremendous hurry."

"Did you try to stop him?" came from Frank.

"I did not have time to stop him. The train moved off as soon as he hopped aboard. I telegraphed ahead to the authorities at Panama, but so far no answer has come back," went on the professor.

"Will they hold him in this country?"

"I think so. I understand some of the counterfeit money was circulated in Colombia, as well as in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The money of one republic is often used in another."

"I hope they catch him," put in Hockley. "I'll never feel safe so long as that rascal is at liberty. He will strike at us if he can get the chance."

"Oh, he is bitter; no doubt of that!" said Sam.

The discovery that Ramon Malaya was on the Isthmus gave them much food for talk, and the subject was threshed out for a good hour. But nothing new came of the discussion.

The professor had thought to get word back from Panama before retiring, but no telegram was received.

In the morning, however, a local official called at the hotel for some additional particulars concerning the man wanted.

"He was not seen on the train when it came into Panama," said the official. "Either he disguised himself thoroughly, or else he left the train before Panama was reached."

"More than likely he left the train," said Amos Strong. "If he saw me he probably thought I would send a telegram to stop him. I sincerely hope you will watch for him."

"Oh, we will! We have already received advices from Nicaragua, so there will be no trouble about holding him if only we can lay our hands on him," concluded the official.

The morning was spent around Colon, and in the afternoon another visit was paid to Monkey Hill, and to the cemetery located there. Toward evening the boys went bathing, in a corner of the bay which was fenced in and kept free from alligators, sharks, and the like. All enjoyed the bath very much, and they declared Colon a pretty good sort of a spot, despite

its intense heat and its reputation for fever and malaria.

“To-morrow we will go up to where some work has been done on the canal,” said Amos Strong.

The journey proved as interesting as any that had gone before. They saw where the excavating had been done for a distance of several miles, and inspected much of the machinery, now standing in the open and gradually going to ruin. Then they visited some of the offices of the company, and looked over a mass of maps, of more or less interest.

“It’s a gigantic undertaking,” was Sam’s comment. “When it is completed it will be one of the world’s wonders.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE JUNGLES OF THE ISTHMUS

“ALL aboard for Panama and the Pacific!”

It was Darry who uttered the cry, on the morning following, as he rushed into the room Mark and Frank were using. “What a glorious day for the trip!”

It was indeed a fine day—remarkably cool for that season of the year. A light breeze was blowing, sending the waves into white foam over the reef beyond Manzanilla Island.

It did not take the boys long to dress, and then they went below for coffee and rolls, the usual early meal of foreigners on the Isthmus. Coffee and rolls are served at six to eight o'clock, breakfast at ten to eleven, and dinner from five to seven. When folks are up late an additional lunch is served before retiring.

When they arrived at the railroad station they found the train in waiting. Tickets had been procured for Panama, with stop-overs at several points,

for during the trip they wished to see as much of the Isthmus as possible. Little did any of them dream of the strange adventures in store for them.

The service on the Panama railroad is better than what might be expected in such an out-of-the-way place. They found the cars clean and comfortable, and the rate of speed was even greater than they desired as they gazed out of the windows at the panorama flying past.

After leaving Colon there was a swamp to cross, and then they swept past Monkey Hill, with its little station. Another swamp followed, and soon they plunged into a dense part of the jungle, where the trees and bushes fairly brushed the sides of the car. The train was climbing the hills, and the locomotive panted and puffed like a thing of life.

It did not take long to reach the Indian village of Gatun, located on the Chagres River, about ten miles from Colon. The village is hardly more than a collection of huts, with numerous canoes and dugouts lining the river bank.

"The Chagres is usually a slow-flowing stream," said the professor, as the train crossed one of the substantial iron bridges. "But during the wet season it overflows its banks and I have heard it said

that the water has been ten feet and more over the top of the bridge just crossed."

"I shouldn't want to be on the bridge at that time," observed Darry.

"If you were, you wouldn't stay there very long," added Sam.

After leaving the Chagres they passed the settlements of Lion Hill, Tiger Hill, and some others, presently running into Bohio Soldado, where there are some extensive stone quarries.

"Much of the stonework we saw in Colon came from these quarries," said Amos Strong. "I have heard it said that they have some excellent stone workers here."

"It must be terribly hot work," came from Hockley.

"It is, Jacob, but they get used to it. All the world over, it is simply what folks get used to. The African could not stand it to take a trip to the North Pole, and the Esquimau would roast to death in the tropics."

When Gorgona was reached the boys were glad enough to get out and stretch their legs. There was a hot box on one of the car wheels, so they made a stay of some length in the settlement.

"The next stop, Matachin, is the middle of the line," said Amos Strong. "We shall stop there to pass the train bound east. From that point on we will climb the hills to Culebra, which is the highest point of the line, 240 feet above sea level. Some canal cutting has been done at Culebra and vicinity, but nothing compared with what must still be accomplished."

The car wheel was at length cooled off and oiled again, and the train proceeded on its way, through a jungle and around a sharp curve of rocks. Here there was an opening, and from the car windows they could see across a valley for a distance of several miles. All was thickly overgrown with trees of many sorts. Occasionally they caught sight of a stream or a pond, glittering brightly in the sunshine.

Just before Matachin was reached the train slowed up, for some workmen were repairing that part of the line. Sam was gazing ahead to where the men were laboring when he suddenly uttered a cry.

"What is it?" questioned several of the others.

"Unless I am mistaken, there is Ramon Malaya!" ejaculated the youth from Boston.

"Oh, Beans, are you sure?" came from Darry.

"No, I am not sure, for he had his back toward me, but—— There he is now!"

All of the boys, as well as the professor, gazed in the direction pointed out. A man wearing a white linen suit and a broad straw hat, was walking away from the railroad to where a mule stood tethered to a tree.

"It is Ramon Malaya beyond a doubt," said Mark.

"What can he be doing here?" asked Frank.

"That's a conundrum," put in Sam. "But I know what I propose."

"And that is——"

"That we go out and make him a prisoner," finished the Boston boy. He had not yet forgotten the trouble he had had because of the counterfeit money.

"That's the talk," came from Mark. "Let us go by all means."

Each of the boys looked at the professor. Before the latter could speak the train began to move off.

"Yes, we ought to have that rascal arrested," said the tutor. "But it is too late now."

"Can't we stop the train?" asked Frank.

"We shall be at the next station in a few min-

utes," said Amos Strong. "It is only half a mile away."

The minutes dragged by slowly. The professor was almost as enthusiastic as those in his charge, and readily agreed to go back to where the Spaniard had been seen, provided they could hire mules or other means of transportation.

"He had a mule," he said. "And to follow him on foot would hardly be wise."

The next station reached, they left the train and inquired of the station-master where they might procure animals of some kind.

Horses were scarce, and mules, too, were not overplentiful. Amos Strong procured rather a poor steed for himself, and the boys were provided with animals that were no better.

"Never mind, four legs are better than no legs," said Darry lightly. "And that mule Malaya had didn't look like a racer."

"You see to it that your mule doesn't lead you into trouble, Dartworth," returned the professor, by way of caution.

They were soon on the way, the party hiring the animals out showing them the road, which during the time that work was going forward on the canal

had been a trail much used. Now, however, it was choked with brush and vines, and they had to pick their way with care.

"I don't believe the good weather is going to last," said Amos Strong, as they pushed on. "There is a certain stillness in the air which, in the tropics, usually betokens a storm."

"Oh, it looks bright enough," returned Frank. And he was right, for the sun still shone as clearly as ever.

The way grew rougher as they advanced, and more than once they had to cut the hanging vines with their jack-knives. At one point there was a washout, and they had to find a route around a hole full of soft mud and all of fifty feet in diameter.

"If a fellow got into that it would be almost as bad as quicksand," was Darry's comment.

It took longer than they had expected to reach the point where they had seen Ramon Malaya. To their chagrin, the workmen on the road had departed eastward on a hand-car, so the spot was deserted.

"Not a soul here to question," sighed Mark. "This is rough, isn't it?"

The ground was soft around the spot, and they readily made out the hoofprints of Malaya's mule.

They led northward, along a path that appeared to be cut straight through the jungle.

"Have you any notion where this leads to?" asked Sam of Amos Strong.

"I have not. Perhaps we had better go back."

But the boys demurred, and in the end they moved forward once more. Strange to relate, the trail was a comparatively easy one and before long several miles had been covered.

Not a sign of a house or hut had appeared. To the eastward was a gentle slope leading into a valley, to the westward a rise to the top of a distant hill.

"I hear voices," cried Darry presently. And then he added: "I guess they are nothing but monkeys."

He was right, and soon they came upon a tribe, all squatted in the roadway, examining a black bottle one had picked up. It had contained liquor and they were sniffing at it in mingled curiosity and delight.

"I'll wager Ramon Malaya emptied that bottle and threw it at them," said Mark.

The monkeys scattered to the trees on their approach, fairly deafening the young explorers with their shrill chattering. One was on the point of hurling the bottle at Sam, when another snatched it from him and leaped away. Then there was a wild

scramble, and soon the monkeys disappeared in the distance.

"I am glad they are gone," said Hockley. "They fairly make my ears ache."

"I wonder when this trail will come to an end," said Frank, a while later.

"I see an opening ahead," answered Mark, who was riding in advance close to the professor. "There is a hut, and——"

Mark got no further, for just then a strange sound, half squeal and half roar, rent the air.

At once the steeds the party were riding became uneasy, and the mule Frank rode threw the youth heels over head into the brush.

"What in the world is that?" cried Darry, in alarm, and caught Frank's mule, to keep the animal from running away.

Scarcely had the boy spoken when there came a crashing in the bushes and another squealing and roaring rent the air. Then the bushes parted and into the trail directly before them rushed a score or more of wild boars, with pointed tusks and eyes gleaming wickedly. In another instant the wild and savage beasts were almost upon them.

CHAPTER XXX

THE EFFECTS OF A TROPICAL STORM

“ THEY are going to run us down! ”

“ We'll be thrown right among them! ”

Such were the cries that rang out as the wild boars charged the horses and mules the party were riding.

The savage beasts were large and evidently exceedingly ugly over something, what nobody in the party could just then tell. They snorted and roared furiously, and the leader made a mad dash straight for poor Frank, who sat up at the side of the road, dazed and bewildered over the manner in which he had been thrown from his saddle.

“ Leap to one side, Frank! ” called Amos Strong. He had pulled out his pistol. A second later the weapon rang out, and the wild boar fell, shot through one of those gleaming eyes.

The fall of the leader temporarily checked the rush of the others, and the squealing became louder. Soon the boys noticed a swarm of something dark over the boars in the background.

"Hornets," came from the professor. "They disturbed a nest in the thickets and the hornets are making it hot for them. That accounts for their squealing."

By this time Frank was on his feet, and a leap took him into the saddle. Then Sam's pistol was discharged, and another boar fell, seriously if not mortally wounded.

"I think we had better back out," came from Amos Strong, and they followed the suggestion without delay.

But with one dead and the other dying, the boars were badly frightened, and soon they darted into the thickets once more, and the hornets went after them.

"Are—are they gone?" panted Hockley, when the unexpected encounter was over.

"Yes," answered Amos Strong, "and I doubt if they return."

The dying boar was grunting painfully, and to put him out of his misery Professor Strong gave him a bullet in the ear.

All were afraid Frank had been hurt by his tumble, but the youth declared that he was as well as ever.

"I got some dirt on me, but that doesn't count. Mark, you should have taken a snapshot at those boars."

"Wish I had—with a shot-gun," was the answer.

It was decided to leave the beasts where they had fallen, for nobody wished to carry such a load while the hunt for Ramon Malaya continued. On they went again, to the opening previously discovered by Mark.

Here were two huts, thatched with palm and deserted. Before one of the huts were the ashes of a fire.

"That is not over a few hours old," said Amos Strong. "Somebody must live here."

"Let us rest a bit," suggested Darry. "Perhaps we are on the wrong trail after all."

"I don't care if we are, this is fun after all," came from Sam. He was quite proud over his shot at the wild boar.

They were in the act of dismounting, when they saw two natives approaching from down the hillside. They had some fish strung on the twig of a tree and gazed in wonder at our friends.

In a few words of Spanish, Amos Strong ex-

plained how they had come there, and asked if Ramon Malaya had been seen.

"Yes, we seen the man, señor," was the answer.
"He go up the hill only a short while ago."

"Can you take us in that direction? We will pay you," went on the professor.

"Take you, señor, after the storm is over, not now."

"Will the storm be here soon?"

"The storm is coming now."

Amos Strong looked upward. The native was right: the sky was clouding over, and soon the sun was obscured and a slight breeze began to rustle through the forest.

"The storm is coming; we shall have to remain here," announced the tutor to the boys. "We can be glad of the shelter of the huts."

In a very short space of time it began to rain, and soon it was pouring in torrents. The sky became black, so that they could see little or nothing. They tied up their animals and crowded into the larger of the two huts, while the natives took shelter in the smaller.

Soon the storm was on them in all of its violence. The wind rose and fell in fitful gusts, and the tor-

rent of water became literally a deluge. The trail, that had seemed so hard and dry, was turned into a watercourse, down which the torrent from the hillside gushed as from some great hidden spring.

"Gracious! when it rains here it rains!" exclaimed Mark. "This is worse than some of the downpours we struck in Venezuela. You can't see a hundred feet in any direction."

So far there had been little thunder and lightning, but now came a blinding flash, followed by a crack like that of a gigantic pistol. Then followed a crash in the jungle not two hundred feet away.

"That's a tree going down," said Mark, after the terror of the instant was over. "And it was pretty close, too."

"I always hated thunder storms," put in Sam nervously. "Every time there comes a crack like that I have to jump."

"It is really dangerous——" commenced the professor, when a second flash fairly blinded them all. Then came a sound like the bursting of a cannon, and the very hut itself appeared to be in a blaze of fire.

Almost stunned, Mark and Professor Strong were the first to recover from the shock. They found

that the lightning had struck a calabash tree directly behind the hut, and the tree in coming down had cut off a corner of the structure. Frank, Sam, Darry, and Hockley lay in a heap on the floor.

"Are any of them dead?" questioned Mark hoarsely.

"I trust not," answered the professor. "Come, we will carry them into the open air."

This was done, and it was discovered that none of the boys was seriously affected, although it was some time ere Darry and Hockley came to their senses.

"I've had enough of this," were Hockley's first words. "Let us get back to the railroad and take the train for Panama."

"So say I," added Darry.

"We shall have to wait until the storm clears away," answered Amos Strong. He was rather sorry himself that they had made the effort to find Ramon Malaya.

The natives had been frightened by the thunder, and they came running out to see how the travelers had fared.

They declared that the storm would soon be over, yet for half an hour after that the rain came down as

heavily as ever. But the thunder rolled away in the distance, and that was the end of it.

"Bad traveling now," said one of the natives to Amos Strong. "Not good to go up the hill."

As soon as the rain ceased the sun came out strong, and as a consequence in a few minutes everything was fairly steaming from evaporation.

As the storm had damaged the trail greatly, Amos Strong hired the natives to show them the way back to Matachin by a shorter route. Luckily the horses and mules had not been hurt by the lightning.

"One of these men tells me that a train is due going west in just an hour," said Amos Strong. "Perhaps we can catch that. If not, we shall have to remain over until to-morrow morning."

"Perhaps the train will be late," said Frank. "The storm may render the track impassable at some points."

It was a silent and thoughtful crowd that pushed on behind the natives. The search for Ramon Malaya had been unsuccessful and had only brought them discomfort and peril.

"Hark!" cried Mark, just before Matachin was reached. "I hear a whistle."

"The train is coming," put in Hockley. "Let us try to catch it if we can."

His horse was in better condition than any of the others, and he spurted ahead, with the others following as best they could. Soon the tall youth reached the tracks and tore along in the direction of the station.

But the train was there before him. The stop was made, some few passengers got off and on, and away pulled the train on its way to Panama.

"Lost it!" cried Darry, and his face fell as he rode up.

"Yes, and that is not the worst of it," ejaculated Hockley, his face full of excitement.

"Why not?"

"Ramon Malaya got on board."

"What!"

The cry came from nearly all of the others.

"Are you sure?" questioned the professor.

"Not quite sure, yet the man looked a good deal like the Spaniard," answered Hockley. "He was dressed like him and he walked like him. I didn't get a very good look at his face."

"It's not unlikely Malaya took the train," said Mark. "I don't see why he should stay in such an out-of-the-way place as this."

“Why can’t we send a telegram to Panama?” suggested Frank. “Then the authorities could catch him when the train arrives.”

“A good plan, Frank; we will do it,” said Amos Strong.

The telegraph office and ticket station were all in one building. It was almost deserted when they entered. A sleepy-looking young man sat dozing in a chair, a half-burnt cigarette between his fingers.

“Sorry, señor, but I cannot send a telegram to Panama for you,” he said, in reply to the professor’s question.

“And why not?”

“The storm has torn down the wires and the connection is broken.”

CHAPTER XXXI

SAM MAKES A DISCOVERY

"THAT is cheerful news," remarked Sam, after a painful pause. "Evidently, Señor Ramon Malaya has slipped us again."

"It looks like it," returned Mark. And then he added suddenly: "If the wires are down, what about the track? Perhaps the storm has swept part of that away."

The station-master was questioned on that point.

"He says that so far as he knows the track is in good condition," said Amos Strong, after the man had been interviewed.

"When does the next train leave for Panama?" asked Darry.

"Half-past eight to-morrow morning."

"Then we've got to remain here over night," grumbled Hockley. "I must say I don't like it much."

"Nor do I, Jacob; but we shall have to make the best of it," replied Professor Strong.

Thinking that the travelers might have money to spend, the station-master became interested, and finally told them where they could obtain good accommodations for the night.

It was at a combined boarding house and hotel, kept by a native name Enrique Cerda. A number of men working on the railroad boarded there, and also several lumbermen. The accommodations, while not of the best, were better than they at first expected.

The house was a long, low, rambling one of a single story, built of stone and with a galvanized iron roof. It was L-shaped, and contained two sets of rooms, one to the front and the other to the rear, with a narrow and dark hallway running between. At the corner was a barroom and directly behind it the dining room. The cooking was done in a shed in the center of the yard.

The young explorers were hungry, and did full justice to the stew set before them, even though it did smell rather strongly of onions. They also had an omelet and some fresh bread and coffee, with stewed plums for dessert.

Mark and Frank were given a small room at one end of the building. In the next room was the pro-

fessor, while the other boys occupied an apartment across the hallway.

Hockley and Darry, being thoroughly tired out, soon fell asleep, but for some reason he could not explain, Sam remained wakeful. He was still somewhat excited over the shooting of the wild boar and dozed off only to awake with a start, thinking the boars were again charging him.

Sam lay close to a door which communicated with the next room. This door was now locked and the bed was set against it. The wood of the door was thin, and, lying as he did, the boy from Boston could hear with ease all that was said in the next apartment.

Presently two men came into the next room and made preparations to retire. Evidently they had been drinking rather freely, and their tongues ran in a lively manner. One of the men was either an American or an Englishman, while the other was a native.

At first Sam paid but little attention to the newcomers, wishing they would go to bed and keep quiet. But presently he heard the name of Malaya mentioned, and he raised up in curiosity and listened more intently.

"And what did dat Malaya say to him?" he heard the native ask.

"He said he could do nothing at present, that some of his enemies were now on the Isthmus," answered the other man. "It seems he got into trouble with 'em while they were in Nicaragua."

"About de bad money?"

"I guess that was it. You know he's a sly one and don't let out all he knows."

"Yes, I know dat, Fisk. When dat money of da paymaster go years ago, Malaya not say much, ha! ha!"

"Don't talk so loud," came warningly from the man called Fisk. "No use to wake anybody up. But say, Nenez, do you know how much Malaya got out of that paymaster's money?"

"He got twice so much as udders got," growled Nenez. "Palanco got shot, an' his brudder got killed, but Malaya no give Palanco one dollar more, no. But dat beesness all dead now, wid no more work on da canal," went on the native, with a long yawn.

"Where did Malaya go to?"

"Say he go to Panama, to see Juan Rorafaro. Somet'ing 'bout da bad money, t'ink."

The talking came to an end, and presently Sam heard one of the men begin to snore, showing that the pair had retired.

It must be confessed that Sam's head was in a whirl. He had heard important news. Would it be best to inform the professor at once, or wait until daylight?

He could not sleep, and after a while he arose and slipped on part of his clothing. Then he stole out into the dark hallway and made his way to the door of Amos Strong's apartment.

The tutor was a light sleeper, and it took but a few taps to awaken him.

"Who is there?" he demanded.

"It is I, Sam," answered the boy. "I want to speak to you. Please keep still."

Knowing that something unusual had occurred, Amos Strong arose quietly and opened the door. Sam came in, closing the door after him. Then he repeated what he had heard, word for word, as near as he could remember.

"This is certainly important," said Amos Strong, when the youth had finished." Evidently this man Fisk and the native called Nenez are in league with Ramon Malaya, and all of them are in league

with somebody at Panama named Juan Rorafaro."

"And it looks as if the crowd stole the paymaster's money, that that surveyor was telling us about—the hundred thousand francs."

"That is true, my boy. The money was stolen somewhere between here and Colon, and the surveyor said there were seven or eight in the party."

"If they are the same crowd they should be arrested."

"You are right, Samuel. But we must go slow. I will find out in the morning if these men are known in this neighborhood."

The matter was talked over a few minutes longer, and then Sam retired once more. But it was an hour before he could get to sleep.

In the morning when our friends arose the two men were still sleeping. By a few cautious questions put to several of the servants, Amos Strong learned that both Nenez and Fisk were well known in that locality. Both had in years gone by worked on the canal, but Fisk was now a lumberman and Nenez was interested in the raising and shipping of cattle. Both apparently were doing well, for they

always had money to spend. Yet, so one servant added, the cattle and the lumber trade with other dealers was rather poor.

"Nenez and Fisk do not get all of their money from their honest work," said Amos Strong to Sam. "But as they do not suspect us we had better let them alone at present and take the train to Panama. Once Ramon Malaya is placed under arrest I imagine the rest will be easy."

The other boys wanted to know what had happened, and on the way to the train Sam told his story.

"We must find Malay by all means!" cried Darry. "If this Juan Rorafaro is known in Panama the thing ought to be easy."

"You want to be careful," cautioned Hockley. "Malaya is a bad fellow at heart, and he wouldn't hesitate to use a pistol if he was cornered."

The train was nearly half an hour late, owing to several washouts along the line. It was only half full of passengers, so they had no difficulty in procuring seats.

"The hill which we thought of ascending yesterday is quite famous in history," observed Amos Strong, as the train pulled out of the station. "It

is from that height that Balboa first saw the Pacific Ocean, in 1526."

It was a short run to Emperador and Culebra. This was the highest point of the road, and having passed the "divide," the course was down the mountains, past the hamlet of Paraiso and the settlements of Pedro Miguel, Rio Grande, and Corozal. At certain points the jungle seemed to fairly press in upon the tracks, so thick was the vegetation.

"We are coming into Panama now," said Amos Strong, presently, and soon they began to pass the scattered houses and huts on the outskirts.

"I have heard it is a very old city," remarked Frank.

"It is. It was founded in 1519. But it was burned, about a hundred and fifty years later, by Morgan's buccaneers, and the new city was built upon its present site."

"Is it very large?" questioned Darry.

"When I was here before it contained about thirty thousand people. I do not believe the present population is much over that. Panama is a free port of entry, and has an excellent shipping interest, in consequence. The people are of all classes, from the poorest peons to the richest importers and exporters.

There is a very fine cathedral here, and some public buildings of note. The streets, however, are not of the best, and the only roadway of note is that along the seacoast, where in years gone by the old Spanish battery used to be located. From the battery one can get a very fine view of the sea, with its numerous islands, and also a view of the coast and Mount Ancon."

"Well, I don't want to go sightseeing until we have made an effort to hunt up Ramon Malaya," came from Sam.

And the other boys, and the professor, agreed with him.

CHAPTER XXXII

AT PANAMA—CONCLUSION

NOTWITHSTANDING their anxiety to locate Ramon Malaya, Professor Strong considered it best to first secure rooms at a hotel for the party.

Accordingly, when they left the train at the station in Panama, a carriage was hired, and they were quickly driven to the leading hostelry of the city, a well-kept two-story affair, located on one of the main streets. Good rooms were speedily procured, and the checks for their baggage were transferred to the hotel clerk.

"Now, I think I had best pay a visit to the police station," said Amos Strong. "Samuel can go with me. The rest had better remain here until we return."

"Why can't we go to the station and wait outside?" suggested Frank.

This was agreed to, and soon they set off for the native police quarters, located in a somewhat old building but a short distance from the hotel.

Leaving the others standing under an awning on the opposite side of the square, the professor and Sam entered the building to make a report of the situation.

"Phew, but this is hot," observed Darry, after five minutes had passed. "I am going down the street and see if I can't get more of a breeze."

He moved off, and the others followed, occasionally looking back to see if Professor Strong and Sam were as yet coming out of the station.

Darry had walked but a few hundred feet, and had come to a halt in a shady spot, when he happened to glance at a sign not far away. It was over what looked to be a small office devoted to brokerage, banking, and money exchanging. The sign read 'Juan Rorafaro.'

"The very man we are looking for!" exclaimed the boy, and motioned for the others to approach.

"What's up?" questioned Mark.

"Look at that sign."

"Well, I never, Darry! Surely we've struck luck!"

"Do you think Ramon Malaya is inside?" came from Hockley.

"If he is we had better keep out of sight," put in

Frank. "If he sees us he will do his best to hide."

"I'll take a peep into the window," said Darry.

There was a small show window, covered with a heavy iron grating. Standing on tiptoes, the youth was enabled to look over a low board partition into a small office, wherein were located several chairs, a desk, and a small safe.

"He is there!" he cried excitedly.

"Are you sure?" questioned Mark.

"Yes, he is talking to a tall, heavy-set man with a black beard."

"That must be Juan Rorafaro," said Hockley.
"Better get out of sight again."

"The two are looking over some papers and some gold coins," went on Darry, as he rejoined his companions. "Frank, can't you run back and tell the professor of this? The rest of us can remain here on guard."

"Sure," replied Frank, and without delay he sped down the square. Watching him the others saw him disappear into the station.

Two minutes passed—that seemed unusually long to the waiting boys—and then the door of the banking place opened and Ramon Malaya appeared.

"Here he comes," cried Darry. "Say, don't let him get away!"

"Not much!" came from Mark.

"Be careful!" warned Hockley. "Remember, he may be armed."

Ramon Malaya had stepped into the street. Half a dozen steps brought him to where the boys stood, in the shelter of a doorway. With a rush Mark and Darry reached the Spaniard and each caught him by an arm.

"So, Ramon Malaya, we meet again," said Mark.

The Spaniard stared at them in amazement and his face fell. He uttered something in Spanish that they did not understand. He was taken completely by surprise.

"You—ah—you follow me, not so?" he stammered, at last.

"We followed you to Panama, yes," came from Darry.

"Whatta for?"

"I reckon you know what for," answered Mark.

"We are on to your counterfeiting game," put in Hockley, growing bolder, now that Malaya made no effort to draw a weapon.

"My counterfeiting game?" repeated the Span-

iard slowly. "It is a riddle you talka in. Whatta I know of da counterfeits?" And he scowled darkly.

"You will come with us to the police court," went on Mark.

"Nevair!"

Ramon Malaya tried to pull himself free and in his struggle nearly twisted his coat from his back. But Mark and Darry held fast, and Hockley aided by hitting the Spaniard a staggering blow in the neck.

"Help! help!" shouted Mark and Darry. "Help!"

"Frank is coming!" exclaimed Hockley. "And so are Sam and the professor, and a pair of officers!"

The report was true, and seeing the struggle going on the others pushed to the spot with all speed.

Realizing that he was cornered, Ramon Malaya fought desperately. He landed a blow on Mark's shoulder, and, leaping forward, hurled Hockley to the ground.

"Hold him!" screamed the tall youth, in terror. "He'll kick me to pieces!"

"Not so fast!" ejaculated Darry, and leaped after the Spaniard. By a quick motion he put out his left foot, and Ramon Malaya went sprawling his full length on the dirty pavement.

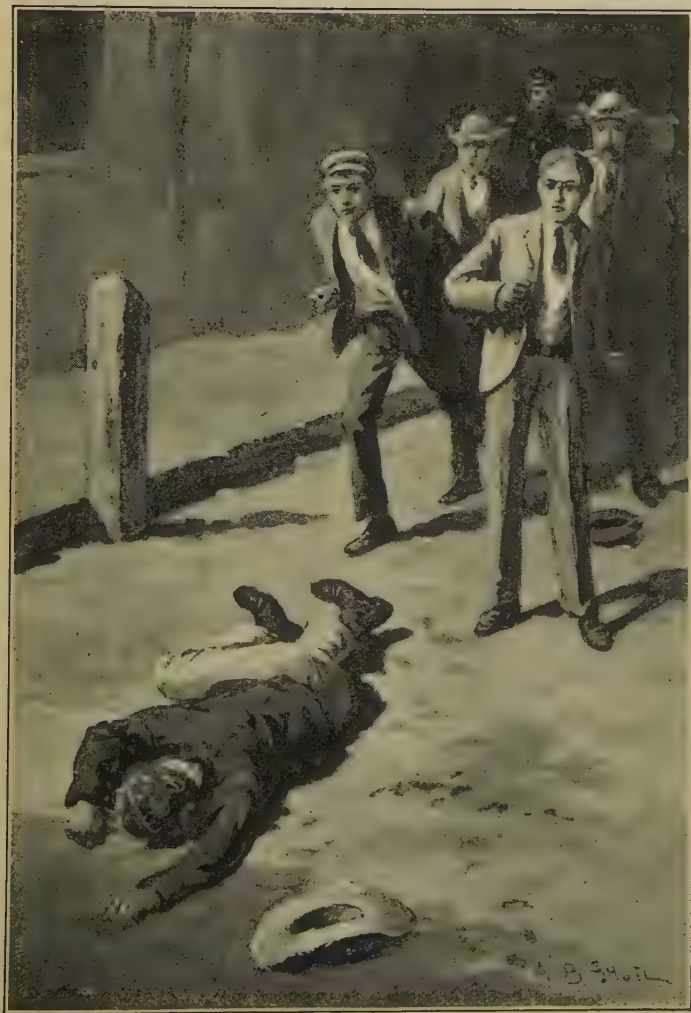
When the Spaniard arose it was too late to make another move. He was completely surrounded by our friends and the two police officials, and one of the latter held a pistol, ready to use the weapon if the Spaniard should attempt to take to his heels. At once Ramon Malaya put on an injured air.

"It is a great mistake, officer," he said, in Spanish. "I have done nothing to deserve such treatment. I am an honest Nicaraguan boatman, and have come to Panama merely on business. These are the rascals who should be arrested." And he pointed to Professor Strong and the boys.

"They make a strong charge against you and you will have to submit," was the reply from one of the police officials.

In vain Ramon Malaya argued. Then he grew abusive, and in the end was handcuffed and led away.

"The police tell me that they have long suspected Juan Rorafaro, but that they could never get any direct evidence against him," said Amos Strong.



Ramon Malaya went sprawling his full length. — *Page 302*

“But now they will take the bull by the horns and raid the place without delay.”

The raid took place immediately after Ramon Malaya was disposed of, and both Juan Rorafaro and his bookkeeper were placed in custody. Then the offices were thoroughly searched, and a number of incriminating documents were discovered, and also a small bag full of counterfeit gold and silver coins. Where the base coins had been made nobody would tell.

The next train bound eastward from Panama carried several officers of the law. These got off at Matachin, and, an hour later, succeeded in gathering in first the man named Fisk and later the native called Nenez.

As Sam had surmised, Nenez was a coward at heart, and soon after being taken into custody he broke down completely, and told the whole story of how Ramon Malaya had organized the raid on the paymaster's strong-box, aided by seven other men, and of how, later on, Malaya and Juan Rorafaro had begun to circulate the bad money. At first it was circulated only in Colombia, but later on other pieces went into Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The headquarters for the bogus coins was at Rorafaro's

offices, directly under the noses of the Panama officials. But Rorafaro was a great church-going man, and well thought of by many citizens, so it took the police a long time to suspect him.

"It's quite a haul," said Sam, after the excitement the affair had produced was over. "I guess the authorities will not be easy with Malaya and his companions in crime."

"No, they will get all they deserve, rest assured of that," answered Amos Strong.

"Do you think they will find any of that paymaster's money?" questioned Darry.

"Not likely—after so many years."

Yet some of the money was recovered—about twenty thousand francs, not quite four thousand dollars. The balance had been spent or lost, and that was the end of it. It may be added here that neither Mark nor Darry went to the trouble of trying to recover the money stolen from them on the San Juan River.

"It wasn't very much," said Mark. "What I was after mostly was satisfaction."

"That's it exactly," replied Darry. "And I reckon we got it."

A few words more and I will bring to a close this

story of sightseeing in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and on the Isthmus of Panama.

Panama offered many sights that were new to the young explorers, and they spent several weeks in the city and vicinity, visiting the public buildings, the churches, and the ancient forts. They also took a trip out to several of the islands, and one day was spent in shark catching, a unique and novel sport.

During that time Juan Rorafaro and several of the others were tried and sentenced to prison for various terms. Ramon Malaya was sent to Nicaragua under a strong guard, where his fate was similar to that of his cousin, Manuel Nonti.

"I sincerely trust we have no more trouble in the future," said Sam. "All I want to do is to see the sights and have lots of fun."

"Right you are, Beans," came from Darry.

"Here is news," said Mark, who was perusing a home newspaper he had just received. "It is stated that President Roosevelt favors the Panama Canal route, and that Congress will be asked to buy out the French interest here and complete this waterway."

"Well, I hope Congress does something," said Frank. "We've got to have one canal or the other."

"Where are we to go next?" asked Hockley.
"There is no use in remaining in Panama forever."

"That is a point to be decided soon," put in Frank. "I hope we go to some place where there is lots going on." Frank's wish was gratified, and what the immediate future held in store for the young travelers will be told in the next volume of this "Pan-American Series." In that we shall meet all the young explorers again, amid scenes as novel and exciting as those already depicted.

"Taking it all in all, we've had some jolly good times," said Sam, as he leaned over the old gray wall of the Spanish battery, overlooking the tranquil Pacific, shining brightly in the sun. "We've been in a few tight places, but they didn't amount to much."

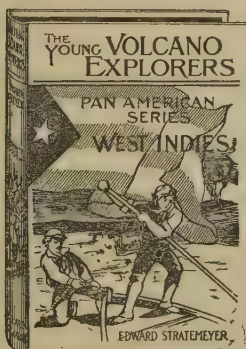
"But what a lot of ground we have covered since we started," came from Darry. "Really, it seems like an age since we left home."

"You're right," put in Mark. "Dear old home! After all, there is no place like home, is there, boys?"

"No place like home," they repeated softly.
And here let us say good-by.

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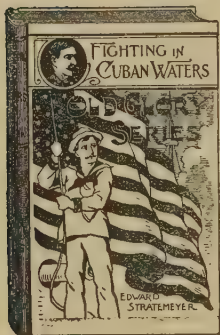
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